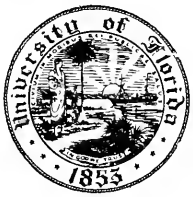

GOD HIDDEN AND REVEALED

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The interpretation of Luther's *deus absconditus* and its significance for religious thought

by

JOHN DILLENBERGER

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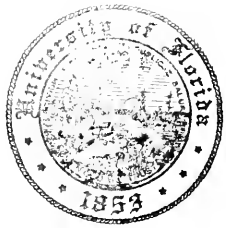

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Above All to Hilda

But Also to Eric and Paul

FOREWORD

In a conversation with William Adams Brown shortly before his death, he said to me: "We have lost the first person of the trinity in contemporary Protestantism and only the second person is left." This statement was surprising, since it came from the lips of one of the leading representatives of the theological school which was largely responsible for the situation he described. The fact to which he pointed was the loss of a feeling for the divine majesty, for the infinite and terrifying character of God's mystery, for the divine holiness which transcends everything intellectual and moral.

The problem of the hidden God is the focus around which the divinity of the divine has been rediscovered in our time. This makes Professor Dillenberger's book extremely important. By showing the diverse ways in which modern theologians understood and used Luther's notion of the hidden God, this book discloses the struggle for a new understanding and the two main ways in which the concept is conceived. Sometimes God is understood as hidden behind his revelation in Christ, as abysmal, ineffable, as the "naked God" before whom no man can stand. Included is the God of the mystery of predestination and of the eternal destiny of man. There is, however, another understanding of the hiddenness of God. The paradox of the cross and the working of God according to the law of contrast, make him hidden and leave him open only for faith. Power in weakness, glory in suffering, life in death show how hidden he is.

As is evident in this book, there is no necessary conflict between these two interpretations. He who is hidden as the abyss behind everything manifest reveals himself in contrast to everything man can expect. Both aspects of the hidden God overcome the idea of a God who is merely the concentration of everything which is good and true in man, of the God who is one person besides other persons, or of the God who is love but not power. Theologians concerned with the reformulation of the doctrine of God, ministers struggling to impart the presence of God in his infinite majesty, and interested laymen who have mastered minimal theological concepts will find Dr. Dillenberger's book indispensable.

Paul Tillich
Professor of Philosophical Theology
Union Theological Seminary

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The moment of writing acknowledgments makes one acutely aware that all one is and thinks is due to having lived in a context of human associations. At the same time, no other human can assume or be asked to assume responsibility for what one has written. Three teachers who influenced my own development more than any others have indirectly, and sometimes directly, left their mark on this manuscript. To Professor Paul Lehmann, now of Princeton Theological Seminary, I am deeply grateful for early having imparted the excitement and rigor of theological thinking; to Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, for a suggestive and always illuminating analysis of major theological problems; and to Professor Paul Tillich, for making me dissatisfied with traditional formulations and pushing me into a living encounter with thoughtful men of the past and present. Professor Horace L. Friess has my thanks for numerous fruitful discussions on the methodology of Rudolf Otto. And the active interest and helpful suggestions of Professor Herbert W. Schneider should not go unnoticed. While this project was begun when all of the above except the first named were my teachers, they have not ceased to be so, though it is now my joy and great privilege to be able to count them among my colleagues in the Columbia-Union program in religion.

I am grateful to my wife for the many direct and indirect ways in which she helped. In the writing and rewriting I gained an appreciation for the frequent statements one reads about wives

without whose help authors could not have written their books. Now I see reality in what I once thought to be perfunctory statements.

Many individuals connected with the libraries of Union Theological Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary deserve my thanks for making special books available. Certainly Mrs. Hugh M. Foster, in the Union library, warrants special mention.

Permission has been generously given by the publishers to quote from the following works:

Brunner, *The Mediator.* The Macmillan Company

Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God.* Westminster Press

Luther, *The Bondage of the Will.* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

Otto, "Sensus Numinus" in *Hibbert Journal.* Messrs. Allen S. Unwin, Publishers

Otto, *Naturalism and Religion.* G. P. Putnam's Sons

Otto, *Religious Essays* and *The Idea of the Holy.* Oxford University Press

Translations from German works listed in the footnotes are my own.

Columbia University
December, 1952

John Dillenberger

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INTRODUCTION

The death of Christ on the cross and the consequent affirmations of his resurrection and of Pentecost attest to the triumphant victory of God over the sin of man. But it is exactly this lordship over life which is least apparent in the cross. The central affirmation upon which Christians insist is an arena of great mystery. In the cross Christians see the light of revelation which makes life meaningful. In it they also discover the greatest puzzle of history.

Neither God's vindication of himself before man, or of man before God, is expected or self-evident in this form. It is hardly expected, since the Old Testament leaves unresolved how the God of Israel can be squared with the history of Israel. The answer to the suffering of a comparatively righteous nation is given in the act of a God who suffered on the cross to show both his righteousness and his mercy or, more precisely, to show that he is righteous in the logic of a love which is merciful without lessening its demand.[1] The answer is given in a drama which re-enacts the problem in more acute form. It is so unexpected, though partially anticipated,[2] that it was inevitable that the cross should be a stumbling block to the Jews.

The form is no less difficult than the act. If there is one point at which God is least self-evident, it is in the notion of a God whose Son suffered, died, and was raised from the dead. The

[1] Romans 3:26ff.

[2] Isaiah 53.

only partial analogy in the dying and rising of the saviour gods of the mystery religions reflects the feeling of mystery in the emphasis upon initiation. The apprehension of God in the cross is not a matter of seeing but of having one's eyes opened. It is not a matter of hearing but of having one's ears opened. God is not simply apparent in the cross as other things are apparent to human beings. The perception of God in the cross implies that the form and content of God's communication of himself do not allow man to treat him as other things. God discloses himself to man but the form excludes that he be taken for granted. God gives himself but the content of that gift is still surrounded by mystery. It is no wonder that the cross is foolishness to those who want to know God directly by reflection.

Christians have maintained, however, that the fullest disclosure of God lies in apprehending him in the events surrounding Calvary. The "why" of the cross nevertheless remains the greatest mystery and silently suggests that God is most hidden at the moment of fullest disclosure. It affirms that in revelation God is both known and unknown.

This dialectical relationship is implicit in the biblical witness and in Christian thought from the beginning. The cross has always been at the foundation of faith and it has usually been surrounded by the mystery of God's nature and activity. Whenever faith and mystery are torn asunder, something less than the miracle of God's disclosure parades as the content and mode of revelation. Moreover, this double relationship pervades every problem of Christian theology. Since theology is dependent upon the content of revelation, it could not be otherwise. Revelation and its correlate, God's hiddenness, have implications for every theological problem. This is particularly the case in such a concept as the wrath of God and in the much-discussed question of predestination. Through an understanding of God's hiddenness, it is possible to set each in a fresh context.

The hiddenness of God is no less apparent in the experience of

faith. Why one person can become a believer and not another confronts one with the unfathomable nature of God. Faith is a decision but it is always a God-given decision. The man who has made the decision knows that God's grace is at its basis, that he has been led to this point. Such is the motive which runs through Augustine's *Confessions.* It takes into account that one can hardly expect to discover God without seeking, but that seeking does not guarantee the experience of God. The one impossible decision, humanly speaking, is to believe in God without experiencing him. Sheerly human decisions have as their fruit something less than a living God. Where the precondition for faith is the meaningful disclosure of God, the hidden character of his activity is inescapable. All theories of election, however stated, arise from the impossibility of finding a criterion for the apparent discriminating character of God's presence. Dostoevski's Ivan in the *Brothers Karamazov* intently wants to believe in God but ends in despair and on the edge of insanity because the decision he wants to make cannot be made without the given presence of God. It is Dostoevski's graphic way of posing the problem of God's incomprehensible nature in a crucial and decisive context.

Every believer also knows that there are periods in which the God whom he has experienced seems distant. There are even times when he is tempted to think that God has deserted him completely. Luther was driven to utter despair by this phenomenon until he could accept that the God whom he had known would again and again make himself known. Only then could he trust God and stake his life upon him. For Luther, as for St. Paul, faith had the experiential or subjective side of an objective encounter, with trust as its consequence precisely when the experience was feeble or lacking.

It cannot be otherwise if it is God who makes himself known to man. Those who experience poverty of spirit as well as riches know something of the power of God and something of his

absence and of his hiddenness. Because God has called them from darkness into light, they are willing to trust the light when it is dim as well as when it is so bright that it dazzles. They know the joy of God's presence, but they also know that he will not always be present. The hidden and veiled character of God's presence makes it impossible to experience him in every moment.

Thus both Christian thought and experience imply a concept of a hidden God. It is affirmed, not eliminated, through God's activity. It is not that God is hidden and then discovered. Nor does he simply step out of hiddenness into the sight of man. Revelation, which is always revelation to someone, itself establishes God as hidden or veiled in imparting himself, and as hidden in the depths of his being. Revelation shows the hidden character of God. The hiddenness of God is not an affirmation of human knowledge. It is the necessary correlate of revelation since it is defined and circumscribed by the nature of revelation.

There are two major aspects of God's hiddenness. The first refers to the nature of revelation, God's apprehension and disclosure in a form which is not self-evident. It includes the mystery of God's communication and of the content of revelation. The second refers to the nature of God in himself as conceived behind his revelation. Here many difficult problems are involved. Generally it can be said that God is not different from his revelation or simply the same as his disclosure. On the basis of God's meaningful presence, man can speak of the depth of God's life and of the mystery of his being behind every manifestation. Out of these two facets—the disclosure of God which remains mystery at the point of utmost meaning, and the depth of God which lies behind revelation—special problems arise, including the wrath of God, election, and predestination.

The classic delineation of these aspects is found in the writings of Luther. The Latin term which he used for the hidden god, the *deus absconditus*, is common parlance among theologians. The understanding of this term in Luther's writings, as well as

the use of the concept in theology, is neither common nor uniform. Nevertheless, in our day the attempt to understand its meaning is a part of the resurgence of theological vitality.

There are references to the concept prior to Luther. It was frequently implied in thinking about revelation though not always directly expressed. In the earliest period the clearest reference to the concept is in the sermons of St. Chrysostom. In the *Stromata,* Clement specifically speaks of the hiddenness of God, as does Origen in his *De Principiis.* Augustine's writings abound with references to the term and its meaning. It is elaborated in a distinctly different form in mystical thought from Dionysius the Areopagite through Tauler. It found its way into scholastic thought primarily through the mystical tradition. But nowhere is there a greater concern with the concept and its integral relation to the nature of revelation than in Luther.

Subsequent to the Reformation, the concept suffered distortion and virtually disappeared. Over a century later there was a notable exception in Pascal. Theologians representing Protestant orthodoxy usually knew too much about the intricacies of the working of God to permit genuine mystery or hiddenness as a part of their heritage. They set the world of God, about which they knew too much, against the world of man. Orthodox thinkers bordered on arbitrariness in their formulations. They had little sense for the genuine mystery and hiddenness before which one's thinking stops. They represented a self-constructed picture of the mind of God in rigid contrast to the mind of man. The mind of God and the mind of man are not commensurate; but there is no virtue in setting them against each other. The net result was that they made an impossible claim to knowledge of God and attempted to impose it upon a world by and large convinced of the impossibility of knowledge under any path remotely related to what was not self-evident. It was inevitable that the pendulum would swing to the other side.

This happened in the Enlightenment. Over against the im-

possible claims of orthodox theologians and the religious conflicts which wrought havoc in political life, it was inevitable that discerning men should turn elsewhere than to the church. The Enlightenment was not antireligious. It felt that through the instrument of reason it had established religion on a firm foundation apart from orthodox scholasticism and party bickering. But the price for such harmony was the decline of Christianity as a powerful and living force for a rather colorless form of religion in general. The Enlightenment was barely in full bloom when men already were trying to rescue religion, and Christianity in particular, from its ensnarement within the domain of reason in respect to content. Kant's restriction of the domain of knowledge to make room for faith was a brilliant but ill-fated attempt to break through the Enlightenment. Hegel's emphasis upon the movement of life and history as itself the domain of God's revelation was likewise an attempt to bring life and vitality into the sphere of religion. Schleiermacher's emphasis upon religion as a new "third" over against duty (Kant) and thought (Hegel) gave promise of a new start until it became apparent that his positive exposition of Christian thought was hardly more than a dynamic form of the Enlightenment. It remained for others such as Fries and Otto to see in Schleiermacher's beginning a new possibility for theology if divorced from his specific Christian utterances. But this attempt also failed to provide an adequate understanding of Christian revelation.

Common to all is the rightful feeling that God's relation to the world does not demand the imposition of an extraneous world view upon the thought world of the time. The endeavor to rehabilitate religion without denying the ordered world of Newton is to be preferred against all orthodoxy. But in respect to content, such endeavors were still caught in the Enlightenment against which they were a protest. If the realms of man and God are both open to the sight of man, whatever the degree of difference, revelation is finally no more than man of himself can

know. If nothing new enters history, there is neither revelation nor God's hiddenness. It is doubtful that the German theologians of the late nineteenth century, such as Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf Harnack, and Wilhelm Hermann, succeeded in decisively moving past this point, however much they emphasized the New Testament as the source of theology.

Since the first World War, the theological climate has undergone nothing short of a revolution. The great German theologian of the late nineteenth century, Albrecht Ritschl, is remembered and read as the fountain source of liberal Protestant thought. But every defender of liberalism in Protestant thought today finds a definite distance between himself and the theologians who followed Ritschl. And from the perspective of dialectical theology, the theological world is decidedly different from either Ritschl or liberalism.

Much has been said and written to account for this rapid change. Certainly the events of history have had an influence upon a generation which hoped for a solution to its major problems. The crisis of our time has called attention to the perennial crisis of man under God. This is not unrelated to the fresh affirmation that the world of God and the world of man belong to different dimensional levels in their relation to each other.

Theologically speaking, the shift has sometimes been characterized as a return to the New Testament via the Reformers. There is truth in this affirmation. But as a general statement it is not sufficiently instructive. Albrecht Ritschl, the first of the great liberal theologians, was as concerned to reconstruct theology through such a procedure as Karl Barth, the first of the crisis theologians. The particular understanding of the New Testament and the Reformers provides the difference, not that it was absent in one instance.

This difference has been characterized as the rediscovery of the meaning of revelation or as the rediscovery of God's other-

ness. Ritschl considered the rediscovery of the meaning of revelation, particularly in respect to justification and reconciliation, as the cornerstone of his theological enterprise. Quite rightly, he considered himself different from his predecessors in this respect. There must be a criterion for distinguishing between concepts of revelation particularly when Ritschl and Barth alike emphasize the New Testament as well as lay claim to the Reformation.

More frequently, interpreters emphasize the "wholly other" God as the crucial dividing line between Ritschl and Barth. But in that case, what is to distinguish Rudolf Otto, the great historian of religion and author of the religious classic, *The Idea of the Holy*, from Karl Barth? Moreover, it is doubtful that the idea of the wholly other can be said to be characteristic of the thought of the earlier, much less the contemporary, Barth.

Facile theologians are only too ready to suggest that the truth lies somewhere between revelation and otherness. But the problem of understanding, much less the problem of what an answer ought to be, is not one of simply mediating between these extremes. Mediation in theology is generally nearer to the truth than the extreme, but it seldom provides the truth. It is only nearer the truth by default. If a correct delineation involves a combination of revelation and otherness, it must certainly be more than rejecting the extremes and engaging in simple processes of addition. Such procedures not only make mediational theology extremely unexciting; they also dull the edge of theological issues.

The systematic-historical analysis in the following pages is the attempt to show that the correlation of revelation and hiddenness is the key to the theological revolution which has taken place. It will become evident that neither revelation nor hiddenness, nor a simple combination, adequately points to the crucial factors in the theological revolution.

The theological forces in the formation of the movement from

Ritschl to Barth are more complex and numerous than usually assumed. In addition to a study of the significant theologians in the interim, some of the most important material deals with the interpretation of Luther's *deus absconditus*. In the decade before and after the turn of the century, tremendous research into the thought of Luther was under way. This was caused both by a renewed interest in Protestantism and by a number of Roman Catholic books on the Reformation which made it necessary for Protestants seriously to examine their heritage. This material, in spite of diversity of interpretation, was not without its effect upon the theological climate. Luther scholars felt called upon to include his ideas in their own formulations.

Even those who were not directly in the field of the interpretation of Luther felt called upon to deal with him at length. Ritschl, the liberal theologian, and Otto, the theologian in the field of the history of religions, took Luther as seriously as did historians such as Adolf Harnack and Reinhold Seeberg. In all this work, the problem of the *deus absconditus* is decisive.

In this progression, the nature of revelation becomes more powerful as the understanding of God's hiddenness in conjunction with revelation is clarified. In the first chapter, it will be evident that there are faint stirrings of this problem in the writings of Ritschl. Although he objects to Luther's use of the term, he affirms an interest in the problem for the sake of his own theological thinking. But the fact is that Ritschl never developed this aspect and to that extent his doctrine of revelation loses much of its power. It is in fact doubtful that Ritschl's understanding left room for the concept in any meaningful sense.

Adolf Harnack and Friedrich Loofs, the Ritschlian historians of thought, follow this pattern while Karl Holl and Ferdinand Kattenbusch are significant exceptions. Within the Ritschlian framework they point to the necessary relation of hiddenness and revelation for their own thinking. They also are among the first to take Luther's assertions seriously. In these men a tremendous

stride was taken toward an understanding of the *deus absconditus*. However, they did not break the mold of Ritschlian thought sufficiently for revelation and hiddenness to emerge as decisive categories. Nevertheless it remains a preliminary and important aspect.

A large number of facets of the problem of the hidden God emerge in the wave of research upon Luther. Because of its intrinsic importance, as well as that this material is usually ignored on the path from Ritschl to Barth, the second chapter is devoted to the exposition of relevant aspects of this ever expanding literature. This does not mean for instance that Barth is directly dependent upon it. Some of this material is contemporary with Barth. But it does mean that significant things were happening on a broader front than is usually assumed and that Barth himself is not unrelated to them.

The suggestive studies of Rudolf Otto stand in a similar relation to Barth as do the researches on Luther, though Barth and Brunner both repudiate the work of the former. Moreover, when his material is reinterpreted, it provides the possibility of understanding the problem of revelation in a new light. It is doubtful that the usual criticism of the wholly other God is meaningful, as if God were declared to be unknown and other. It is rather that God is understood to reveal himself as "wholly other." The latter understanding, as we shall note, is particularly instructive for the relation of Christianity to other religions.

The position of Brunner and Barth is perhaps better known by the general reader than the other material. The diversity which these men represent on problems here explored is also generally known though it is usually taken less seriously than in these pages. Barth's radical insistence that knowledge of God is dependent upon revelation is necessary in the light of the correlation of revelation and hiddenness. It is revelation alone which establishes God's hiddenness in its various forms. Herein revelation is different from any other avenue or concept.

The difficulty in Barth's thought is not that the structure of revelation is incorrectly conceived or that it is derived from the Judaeo-Christian tradition; rather it is that he believes there is truth only in that tradition. His rejection of original revelation as defined by Brunner, however, follows from the nature of revelation, not from Barth's exclusiveness. The relation of hiddenness to revelation makes it necessary, as the last chapter shows, to reject all concepts which border on natural theology even when they are called original revelation.

Barth sees the serious character of revelation and its implication, God's hiddenness. The problem of the nature of this concept for the present lies not in any compromise between liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. Most approaches of that type only obscure the issues. If the truth lies somewhere on this side of or beyond Barth, it should emerge on the basis of theological thinking which, while it is related to the past, is also geared to the present. That is to say, it must be constructed in its own right even if that consists exclusively in drawing out implications rather than in propounding new systems.

While the following chapters are historical in the sense of surveying the forces from Ritschl to Barth, they are systematic in raising the historical questions in the context of a theological interest which is more extensive than history. That is why the last chapter contains, in addition to a fairly extensive exposition of the significance of hiddenness, implications for contemporary theological thinking. These are primarily that the correlation of revelation and hiddenness provides a fresh approach to the problem of revelation and reason, and supplies a better basis for recasting the whole persistent problem of transcendence and immanence.

The contradictory material on Luther is cast into a consistent framework and some suggestions are made for interpreting the history of theology. These observations grow out of the study though they are not necessarily germane to the *deus absconditus*.

Since the problem of historical interpretation is particularly serious for our age and impinges on every theological problem, these reflections appear as a part of the chapter rather than as an appendix to the whole.

Chapter I

DEVELOPMENTS IN RITSCHLIAN THOUGHT

In the Ritschlian movement Protestant theology regained its rightful place as an independent discipline. Caught between Protestant orthodoxy and the Enlightenment, Hegelianism and Pietism, theology had lost much of its vigor. The promising beginning made by Schleiermacher had not come to fruition in many critical areas of Christian thought. In this situation the work of Ritschl and his successors, based as it was on an attempt to revitalize Christian theology through a return to the New Testament via the Reformers, was destined to put new vigor into Christian thinking.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-89), New Testament critic, church historian, and theologian, was the moving spirit of the movement which usually bears his name. Popular in his early years as an exponent of the New Testament from the perspective of the Tübingen school (semi-Hegelian), then unpopular in a period of critical reaction to its tenets, Ritschl made a comeback in the later years of his life and people came from all over the world to listen to him. It was the Ritschl of his later years who influenced two generations of teachers and clergy. His impact upon America was mediated through his writings and through

the lectures of one of his most gifted disciples, Wilhelm Hermann. A number of the older American theologians sat at the feet of Hermann while many more were taught by teachers who had been trained in Germany under the impact of this movement. It is an ironic note that Karl Barth as well as John Baillie once attended Hermann's lectures.

Whatever the differences between contemporary liberal Protestantism and Ritschl, the similarities are more striking. The impact of Ritschl upon the church and Christian thinking can hardly be overemphasized. Distinct vestiges are evident in many of the prominent pulpits of America, where, for instance, the moral character of Jesus is emphasized and men are called upon to be co-operative partners in the building of God's kingdom. It is evident in the equal distrust which many theologians have for the philosophical enterprise and for the mystical traditions.

A. THE ANTITHESIS BETWEEN HIDDENNESS AND REVELATION

Ritschl's most positive contribution to the theological enterprise lies in his insistence that the basis of Christian theology is the revelation in Jesus Christ. Revelation is neither accidental nor an appendage to a system of thought. It is important in its own right, and is attested to primarily in the New Testament. The Reformation is understood as a significant attempt to recover the New Testament message of God's revelation in Christ. For a period uncertain of the center of theology, this was an important gain in theological thinking.

The content of revelation for Ritschl is the love of God manifest in Christ as the founder of the perfect spiritual and moral religion. It involves the contention that men can be freed from the consciousness of guilt and enter into the God-given task of establishing the moral kingdom of God. It includes the recognition that God's fundamental purpose and man's proper understanding of himself are identical. Revelation is not the disclosure of a mystery but the making manifest of what man at best should

have had some knowledge of all along.

This understanding of revelation leaves no ground or basis for God's hiddenness. Nevertheless, Ritschl gave considerable attention to the place it held in Luther's thought and he expressed a theological interest in the problem. In his second article in the series, *Geschichtliche Studien zur christlichen Lehre von Gott,* Ritschl paraphrases crucial sentences from Luther's *Bondage of the Will* as the basis for his comments on the meaning of the *deus absconditus* in Luther. They are as follows:[1]

While a differentiation must be made between the revealed and the hidden will of God, God in the latter sense does not concern us. Here the principle is valid, that that which is above us is nothing to us. God, therefore, is to be left to his own majesty and nature in which he wants to have nothing to do with us. On the other hand, he is of concern to us in so far as he clothes himself in his Word and offers himself to us. The contrast is visualized in the following. As the hidden God, God does not deplore the death which he himself works in people; as the revealed God he deplores the death which he finds in the people, and which he endeavors to remove from them. Therefore, in so far as God is hidden in his majesty, he neither deplores nor abolishes death, but works life, death, and all in all; for here he has not circumscribed himself in his Word but has preserved his freedom over all things. God does much which he does not make known to us in his Word. He also desires many things which he does not in his Word reveal to us that he wants. Thus, he does not will the death of the sinner in explicit accordance with his Word, but he wills it through that unsearchable will. We must let ourselves be led by the Word of God and not by his unsearchable will. It is sufficient just to know that in God there is an unsearchable will. What, why, and how far it wills, we are not permitted to explore or be concerned about; rather we are to fear and adore it. When, therefore, it is said that God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that it is to be accredited to our will—then this is in accord with the point of view of the revealed God. For he wills that all men be saved and, according to Matthew 23:37, places the blame for failure upon the will of man. However, why the majesty of God does not nullify or change in all

[1] Albrecht Ritschl, *Geschichtliche Studien zur christlichen Lehre von Gott,* in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (1896), pp. 77-78.

this fault of the will inasmuch as it does not lie in the power of man to do it; or why he lays that to the charge of man, who cannot avoid wrongdoing, this we dare not explore.

Ritschl's aim is to penetrate behind these words into the genuine meaning of Luther. Finding that Luther affirmed that the hidden God does not concern man but that he is nevertheless to be adored, Ritschl discovers a religious interest in God's hiddenness. Such an interest is further evident in Luther's contention that the hidden God is also the God who has a plan of salvation and that the two are identical even when they appear contradictory. Nevertheless, it is Ritschl's claim that the Reformer was not content with this religious interest and that hiddenness became increasingly important as a speculative theological concept guaranteeing that faith is utterly different from man's natural hopes and expectations. This he finds expressed in the "paradoxical axiom that a declaration concerning God is truer and commends itself more to the needs of our faith the further it is removed from analogy to the structure of human conditions." [2] Hiddenness is now understood as prior to or as a precondition for faith, existing for the sake of humbling man's pride. It means further that faith is the only adequate key to God's activity in the world, since faith must discern God in the hidden. In substantiation Ritschl quotes directly from Luther:

Therefore, that there might be room for faith, it is necessary that all those things which are believed should be hidden. But they are not hidden more deeply than under the contrary of sight, sense, and experience. Thus, when God makes alive, he does it by killing; when he justifies, he justifies by bringing in guilty: when he exalts to heaven, he does it by bringing down to hell . . . Thus he conceals his eternal mercy and loving-kindness behind his eternal wrath: his righteousness behind apparent iniquity. This is the highest degree of faith—to believe that he is merciful, who saves so few and damns so many; to believe him just, who according to his own will makes us necessarily damnable, that he may seem, as Erasmus says, "To delight in the torments

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

of the miserable, and to be an object of hatred rather than of love." If, therefore, I could by any means comprehend how that same God can be merciful and just, who carries the appearance of so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith.[3]

In examining this passage, Ritschl finds that Luther has pushed far in an undesirable direction. God's ways do not merely appear different from the standards of man: they are different. God's ways are not merely unsearchable and unfathomable; God is and acts beyond law (*exlex*) or standard. Nowhere is this clearer to Ritschl than in Luther's comments on the Old Testament story of the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh. According to Luther, God did not create evil but simply moved the evil heart of the Pharaoh in the events preceding the exodus from Egypt. But in considering the further question why God did not stop this activity, or why he permitted Adam to fall, or why he did not change the evil actions of evil wills, Luther had declared:

> God is that Being for whose will no cause or reason is to be assigned, as a rule or standard by which it acts; seeing that nothing is superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things. For if it acted by any rule or standard, or from any cause or reason, it would no longer be the will of God. Wherefor, what God wills is not therefore right because he ought or ever was bound so to will; but on the contrary, what takes place is therefore right because he so wills. A cause and reason are assigned for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator; unless you set up, over him, another creator.[4]

For Ritschl, speaking in this way means that God is not to be judged by any human standards. Moreover, from the perspective of his own thinking, it also means that any claim that this God is above the norm of man also implies that God has no character or nature. Thus he concludes that Luther's idea of the hidden God, expressed, for instance, in the phrase that what God wills is right because God so wills, makes God an arbitrary creature. This is precisely the point to which Ritschl repeatedly objects in his

[3] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1931), pp. 70-71. See also Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 230-31. See Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

exposition of Luther's doctrine of God. His vehemence is nowhere clearer than in the above phrase as it is interpreted by Theodosius Harnack, one of the first great interpreters of Luther. He writes:

> It is an arbitrary interpolation when Harnack represents the thought in such a way as to convey the meaning that God is bound to himself and to his being, to his own natural goodness and that therefore everything which he wills must be good.[5]

Luther's interpretation of the verse that God "has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills," [6] in a manner which indicates that no reason or cause can be assigned to God, is met with equal scorn. He concludes by declaring:

> In these sentences we have first reached the full compass of this thought of the hidden will of God and have to confess that Luther knows quite a great deal in this area and that in this article of faith, contrary to human reason, certain sentences of Paul are pushed to logical conclusions to a greater extent than the authority of Paul would demand or allow.[7]

Thus he not only chides Luther for having moved from mystery to an affirmation of mystery whose essential character is arbitrary will; he charges that Luther knows too much exactly where hiddenness must be affirmed.

Ritschl finds the basis for Luther's use of the *deus absconditus* in his training in the nominalistic form of scholasticism. He contends that it arises out of the scholastic distinction between the *voluntas beneplaciti et voluntas signi.* In scholasticism proper, as distinguished from its nominalistic form,

> The will of God in reference to creatures and their actions is usually divided . . . into the will of good pleasure or complacency and the will of expression—*voluntas beneplaciti et voluntas signi.* The former is the divine will taken in its proper sense; the latter is attributed to God by

[5] Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
[6] Romans 9:18, Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946).
[7] Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

way of metaphor and comprises the various outward manifestations of the divine will.[8]

Thus the *voluntas beneplaciti* affirms a nature in God which is conditioned by what is well pleasing to himself. For Aquinas, for example, it meant God's goodness. Its nominalistic development as Ritschl interprets it, implies that the activity which is well pleasing to God has an arbitrary stamp which cannot be placed under any norm or standard; it is sheer capriciousness.

While Ritschl objects vehemently to this nominalistic development, he is no more sympathetic to the original scholastic meaning. It does not matter to him whether the *voluntas beneplaciti* suggests arbitrariness in God or a nature distinct from, though analogous, to the nature of man. He affirms that scholasticism in either form is under the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite,[9] a speculative mystic who influenced Christian thought well into the Middle Ages. For Ritschl, Luther had not yet learned that God's nature must be defined in necessary relation to the end and character of man.[10]

Ritschl does not suggest that Luther was simply a scholastic. He explicitly states that the Reformer was concerned with the nature of the gospel instead of the balancing of philosophy and theology as in scholasticism or in establishing the borders of each as in nominalism.[11] Luther emphasized "The theology of the grace of God shown in Christ—which admittedly depends for its result upon the free choice of the human will," while the "leading theologians of the middle ages . . . traced Christ's atoning work also to God's arbitrary will." [12]

Luther's advance is that now the *voluntas signi* expresses the genuine nature of God while in late forms of scholasticism God's

[8] B. J. Otten, *A Manual of the History of Dogmas*, Vol. II, p. 64.
[9] Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
[10] Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, pp. 271-72.
[11] Ritschl, *Geschichtliche Studien zur christlichen Lehre von Gott*, p. 69.
[12] Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 200.

redeeming activity is called into question in so far as God's manifestation of himself is insecurely grounded in the undependable arbitrariness of the *voluntas beneplaciti.* Ritschl himself insists that Luther's firm insight into and grasp of what God has done makes any further concern with God's nature apart from his activity or disclosure both unnecessary and undesirable.

But Luther was concerned with God's unsearchable nature. Ritschl finds the reason for this in Luther's battle with the scholastics on the question of merit, and as evidence he points to the concept of predestination. Predestination, anchored in the capriciousness of God, is understood to be Luther's weapon against all forms of semi-Pelagian and Pelagian views in which men make a contribution in the re-establishment of their relation to God.[13] The concept of an arbitrary God of will, including the denial of free will, becomes a powerful weapon against the entire scholastic outlook.[14] So Ritschl concludes that the use of a nominalist framework by Luther was not a mere appendage to his thinking but an essential part through which he combatted the scholastic framework, including nominalism.

Ritschl is not sympathetic to Luther's procedure in spite of its motivation. He finds two contradictory elements side by side—the attempt to say that God's disclosure of himself can be trusted and that God's activity in election is hidden in a God who has no standard. The latter implies an arbitrary God who cannot be found in the Bible and it involves metaphysical speculation foreign both to the New Testament and a legitimate theological enterprise. This side Ritschl prefers to call the "old" in Luther's thought. In contrast, there are elements of the "new," such as the grace of God in Christ freely offered to all men. This grace is the love of God, unencumbered by any reference to wrath, justice, or predestination.

Both in the *History of the Doctrine of Justification and Recon-*

[13] Ritschl, *Geschichtliche Studien zur christlichen Lehre von Gott,* p. 67.
[14] *Ibid.,* p. 86.

ciliation and in the *Geschichtliche Studien zur christlichen Lehre von Gott,* Ritschl claims that the real contribution of Luther is his affirmation that God is love. In neither work, however, does he develop the precise meaning of Luther's contribution. But it is soon apparent that Ritschl believes that this concept is the development of the creative side of Luther. It has already been suggested that Ritschl's understanding of the love of God means God's disclosure that what he intends for the world coincides with the meaning man can discover, namely a co-operative venture in realizing a moral community. This goal is embodied and made fully clear for the first time in Jesus of Nazareth.

Today it is generally agreed that this is not what Luther meant by the love of God. Nevertheless Ritschl maintains that Luther held two irreconcilable elements—the arbitrariness of God and God as love—side by side without any feeling of their contradictory nature. An unchartable, chaotic side of God is affirmed simultaneously with the affirmation that God's nature is love. Ritschl concludes that this indicates that Luther has not even seen the greatest problem of theology, much less solved it.

> Since thus the two thoughts of the freedom of God's will from all rule, and of its necessary restriction by eternal law, are brought forward by Luther in connection with two quite distinct practical problems, and in these have absolutely nothing to do with one another, it is plain that he has not even succeeded in apprehending the highest problem of theology as such, much less has he succeeded in solving it.[15]

This judgment however is immediately followed by this note of praise:

> It is admitted that Luther at the same time surpassed all previous theology when he brought love into prominence as the character which exhaustively expresses the Christian idea of God; and in this fundamental conception of God he recognizes also the ultimate determining motive for the redemption and reconciliation of the sinner that were wrought by Christ.[16]

[15] Ritschl, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation,* p. 201.
[16] *Ibid.,* p. 201.

The development of Luther's notion of the *deus absconditus* is thus rejected by Ritschl, while what he calls the new development of God as love is accepted as the great achievement of Luther in contrast to previous theologians. Ritschl did not dismiss the *deus absconditus* when reinterpreted. In fact, he can still say that one of the genuine contributions of Luther's *Bondage of the Will* consists in the

> . . . undeniable truth that the contents for us of the hidden will of God is not a matter of indifference to us as Erasmus deduced, but also that the over-all activities of God, which lie behind his revealed will, have an indubitable religious interest for us.[17]

This religious interest means that the hiddenness of God must be integrally related to his grace. We noted that Ritschl contends that Luther erred when he assumed an arbitrary God and a God of love, and then attempted to relate them. Such a dichotomy Ritschl wishes to overcome by subsuming hiddenness under revelation, thereby avoiding the speculative and philosophical problem of the older dogmatic theology. He saw that the relation of God's omnipotence to revelation involves unanswerable questions which must be set aside in favor of revelation.

> We shall honor the inaccessibility of this area to the understanding of men in this manner, that we shall only allow our presentiments to wing across the boundary of God's revealed will of salvation toward the background of his over-all activities in order to subject them immediately under the certainty of the grace of God in Christ and thereby suppress further-reaching questions.[18]

It is doubtful that this means more than that there is such a problem as the hiddenness of God and that men are not to think about it. Nevertheless, in his study of Luther, Ritschl called attention to the danger of not relating hiddenness to revelation. The claim that Luther is guilty of such bifurcation will be explored later.

It has already been stated that although Ritschl expressed an

[17] Ritschl, *Geschichtliche Studien zur christlichen Lehre von Gott*, p. 86.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

interest in the hidden God in what he calls a religious as over against a speculative or metaphysical sense, his more systematic treatises not only ignore the problem, but also show that his thinking did not permit the concept in any significant sense. This point must now be substantiated by detailed reference to the structural motifs which underlie his theology. Ritschl gives as the key to his understanding of Christianity the well-known figure of "an ellipse which is determined by two foci." [19] The two points which he stresses are the *spiritual* and *moral* character of Christianity, or redemption through Christ and the ethical-moral character of the kingdom of God.

Redemption refers to the character of life as dependent upon God, which through Christ is directed to "spiritual redemption, i.e. to that freedom from guilt and over the world which is to be won through the realized Fatherhood of God." [20] It is the spiritual emancipation of man who sees his freedom from the past and his uniqueness in creation. This is essential before his activity can be adequately directed to the second focus, ethical activity for the kingdom of God.

The second focus, an ethical kingdom, is the common end for God and man. But it has been entrusted to man for its realization. God and man share in a common destiny, the completion of the goal which God wills for himself and for man. In the words of Ritschl:

> In Christianity we can distinguish between the religious functions which relate to our attitude towards God and the world, and the moral functions which point directly to men, and only indirectly to God, whose end in the world we fulfill by moral service in the kingdom of God. In Christianity, the religious motive of ethical action lies here, that the kingdom of God, which it is our task to realize, represents also the highest good which God destines for us as our supramundane goal.[21]

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[19] Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 11.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 205-6.

It would be too facile, however, to state that Ritschl merely defines the relation of God and man from his view of man. Ritschl denies that he looks at man's goals in terms of the analysis of his nature and that, on this basis, he posits a similar end for God. He is aware of the accusation that he makes religion an appendix to morality, but he dismisses it as ignorance on the part of his readers.[22] For him the two foci of the religious and the ethical are jointly posited. They are a part of the revelation of God and therefore are not defined by deductions from the nature of man. For Ritschl one must start with the "given togetherness" of the end of God and man. He believes in the reality of revelation, though its content is not alien or hidden to the thought, activity, and the end of man. If Ritschl's doctrine of God seems determined by his view of man, this is remote from his intentions. His aim is to indicate that they coincide. In a passage in which he differentiates himself from Aquinas the word "world" instead of "man" occurs. But the point is so emphatically made that we quote it here:

> We find not only that God's personal end and the end of the world are one, but also that the knowledge of the end of the world attainable by us coincides with the Christian idea of the nature and completed revelation of God.[23]

For Ritschl, the love of God, manifest in Jesus as the bearer and personifier of the perfect spiritual and moral religion, is construed in the same pattern. Love emanates from God but it demands a common end or tie with man. This is explicit in his analysis of love in terms of the following: *a*) that which is loved must be like or akin to the lover, *b*) love implies a will which is constant in its aim, *c*) love aims at the advancement of the other's end, and *d*) that end must be taken up as one's own.[24] Or as

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 226, 473. Ritschl admits moving from the ethical to the religious in his Christological thinking. But he rejects that this means that religion is an appendix to morality or that it is based on ethics.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 291.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 277-78.

Ritschl puts it in still another way, God created man as spirit, as a part of his own personal end in order that he might reveal himself to man as love. But this also implies that God made man's end his own end, though he is responsible for the creation of man and by implication, of his destiny. Ritschl thus attempts to show the priority of love, but also that its nature is directly related to man. God is love for Ritschl, or he is nothing at all,[25] but the nature of love is that it can only be directed to that which is akin, namely, man's end. Therefore it is shed upon man and upon his end. Such an emphasis eliminates arbitrariness or any accidental factors in the relation of God and man. Love is consistent and dependable in accord with Ritschl's definition.

Ritschl considers love defined in this way as the key which locks God and man so intimately together in their common end and destiny that all previous theological difficulties are speedily solved. Hence Ritschl can reject the nominalist position and its precursor, scholasticism proper. "Both of these positions, that a thing is good because God wills it, and that he wills a thing because it is good, are equally unsatisfactory."[26] He considers them to be philosophical speculations which do not take into account the close connection between the nature of God and the nature of man. In like manner, he feels that the difficult question of wrath and predestination can be set aside. Since one cannot think of God's goodness in relation to the sinner and at the same time conceive of God's wrath, the latter concept must be abandoned.[27] Predestination, likewise, is not a meaningful term in that it severs the relation of man and God by an emphasis upon the secret, arbitrary act of God.

Ritschl felt that his unique contribution to the history of

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 282.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

[27] On another page of the same book, however, he speaks of wrath as a co-operating element in the concept of justification. But even in this sense, it is not developed as an important concept. Compare, *ibid.*, pp. 87 and 263-64.

Christian thought was the transformation and, often, elimination —through the concept of God's love—of impossible problems such as those just mentioned. It is for this that he wanted to be remembered. Granted the definition of God's love which he expounded, he succeeded admirably. The difficulty, however, is that such an analysis of love hardly corresponds to the unheard of miracle of God's love which remains mysterious even in its manifestations. A serious discussion of the cross is conspicuously absent. Where it is felt that God and man belong so intimately together, it is doubtful that God can be much more than the projection of man's aspirations even when the point of accent is upon God's initiative.

It is evident that the mystery of God in himself or in his activity cannot be a decisive factor in this type of approach. For Ritschl mystery is precisely what needs to be excluded. It is therefore natural that Ritschl does not develop the religious interest in the *deus absconditus* which he mentioned in the historical article on the doctrine of God. The only place where it enters is in his analysis of God's providence. Here hiddenness refers to that which is not known to man in foresight but which is potentially knowable in revelation and in the Christian life, though it is always dangerous to make a judgment.

Faith in God's providence is subject to a difficulty which arises from the religious conception of God himself, and finds precise expression in the statement that the judgments and ways of God are unsearchable (Rom. 11:33). This statement of Paul, however, is not meant to annul the significance of God's revelation. The apostle does not affirm that God is absolutely unknowable; for that would contradict the certainty of his saving revelation. But he affirms that the knowledge of God's general saving purpose, which we possess in virtue of his revelation, does not imply an antecedent knowledge of the special methods by which God guides to salvation particular bodies of men or particular individuals. This special side of God's government of the world remains concealed beforehand, and can become clear to anyone only from experience, as the course of the world takes shape. . . . In Christianity the full revelation of God implies that we can

hardly comprehend the application of God's saving will to our own destiny, or its intertwining with the history of particular groups of men or of the whole of humanity, and that least of all may we, by our prayers and counsels, exercise an influence on the divine dispensations. Indeed, even subsequent reflection of historical events, though guided by the idea of the divine government of the world, is not protected from error by the desire to acknowledge that idea. . . . The historical events of human life are likewise in time, and the nature of their mutual intertwining is obscure, for it is always subject to the interference of human freedom. Who, now, will assert that he has at his command a range of historical observation sufficient for forming a judgment on God's special designs; and who is conscious of being so free from personal guilt that he can decide what group of human actions possesses, in God's judgment, the character of pure right or pure wrong? . . . There are no organs other than those of patience and humility, by which all those experiences of life which lie nearest—those which are most special as well as those which are common—may be comprehended under general faith in God's providence.[28]

It is also clear from these sentences that for Ritschl the mystery of God lies neither in his essential nature nor in his activity but in fitting the details of life into the context of the common end of God and man. One is asked not to be rash or pretentious at that point.

Ritschl made a distinct theological contribution in emphasizing that the point of departure for theological thinking is revelation. He also called attention to the relation of hiddenness to revelation and of the necessity of excluding speculation from its domain. But the defective nature of his concept of the content of revelation finally called into question the center of his entire theological enterprise.

In the interpretation of Luther, Ritschlian thinkers can be divided into two groups. The first, including such men as Friedrich Loofs and Adolf Harnack, follow the line indicated by Ritschl in the repudiation of the idea of the hidden God as a

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 625-27.

medieval remnant.[29] The second, consisting primarily of Ferdinand Kattenbusch and Karl Holl, see a new meaning in Luther's view of the hidden God and also a significant place for it in theological thinking. Although our major concern will be with the latter group, the first two men are mentioned because of their significance in the history of Christian theology.

Loofs attempts to understand Luther's use of a scholastic framework, but contends that it is unfortunate in lieu of the "new" element that Luther has to contribute. For Harnack, Luther also represents the "new," but there is no sympathy whatever for his scholastic elements. Loofs emphasizes the *deus absconditus* as the necessary background to the deterministic view of predestination which he believes Luther, in spite of modification, never surrendered.[30] Hiddenness and predestination are considered synonymous. With Ritschl, he sees Luther's motivation as that of emphasizing that man is saved only through God's grace, and of indicating that the over-all character of God cannot be conditioned or changed by the will or activity of man. In the endeavor, however, to safeguard God's grace by an emphasis upon predestination, he believes Luther was unwittingly led to an amalgamation of the religious and the speculative through the use of scholastic thought. Here too it is claimed that Luther did not carefully think through the problem. The indication of this failure lies in that the discrepancy between the hidden will (*voluntas abscondita*) and the revealed will (*voluntas revelata*) is not solved by Luther in the admonition

[29] Although Ernest Troeltsch directed his historical studies against Ritschl and the Ritschlian historians, he belongs to those who have no sympathy for the concept itself. In so far as he touches on the hidden God in Luther, it means the wonder involved in the trustworthy character of God's relation to man as witnessed in faith. But Troeltsch does not elaborate this point. Nor did he see a new element in Luther, whom he considered directly in the orbit of the medieval world.

[30] Friedrich Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studien der Dogmengeschichte,* pp. 760, 763.

not to think of the *voluntas abscondita.*[31] It is also axiomatic for Loofs that it could not be solved on scholastic grounds.

He also calls attention to new elements in the thought of Luther. This is evident in a speech entitled *Luthers Stellung zum Mittelalter und zur Neuzeit,* in which he shows that Luther's religious outlook gave a radically new approach to Christian thinking though he could not work out the implications because of his immersion in scholastic thought structures.[32] Adolf Harnack essentially repeats the approach to Luther made by Ritschl and Loofs. In over a half-dozen italicized passages, he reiterates that Luther experienced a new religious foundation which is tantamount to the discovery of the gospel, but that it is unfortunately connected both with the dogma of the early church and that of the middle ages.[33] Like Ritschl, he declares that here is only the beginning of the new, which Luther himself neither fully envisaged nor was capable of working out. Writes Harnack in a representative passage:

> What he presented to view was not new doctrine, but an experience, described at one time in words strongly original, at another time in the language of the Psalms and of Paul, sometimes in that of Augustine, and sometimes even in the cumbrous propositions of the scholastic theology.[34]

Concerning the concept of the hidden God, however, Harnack does not admit that a religious experience has been expressed in scholastic terms. Such a statement would have been quite satisfactory to Loofs, and Ritschl expressed a religious interest in the concept. For Harnack, the concept of the hidden God is entirely scholastic and religiously impossible. The greatness of Luther's *Bondage of the Will* is considered to be the relation

[31] *Ibid.,* p. 769.

[32] Friedrich Loofs, *Luthers Stellung zum Mittelalter und zur Neuzeit,* pp. 24, 26.

[33] Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma,* Vol. VII, pp. 169, 172, 194, 224, 238, 243-44, 267.

[34] *Ibid.,* p. 186.

of objective revelation and subjective appropriation. But to append to this the doctrine of original sin and the *deus absconditus* is to add scholastic thought which has already been nullified in the "equivalence of (the) certainty of salvation and faith." [35] To admit a double will in God, as *absconditus* and *praedicatus* (i.e. between the hidden and proclaimed God) would suggest, is only proof that Luther

> . . has not yet rid himself of the bad practice of the scholastic understanding of treating theological perceptions as philosophical doctrines, which one may place under any major premises he pleases, and combine in any way he may choose.[36]

Hiddenness is not a part of the experience of revelation and is only an indication that Luther did not think through the problem.[37] Fortunately, suggests Harnack, the hidden God gradually became more vague for Luther and eventually was identified with the dread of the natural man before God.[38] Real advance was suggested by Luther in those instances where he placed the idea of predestination under grace.[39] Nevertheless the hidden God must be categorically classed as speculation which has no place in the certainty of faith. There is less concern with the concept in the Ritschlian historians than in Ritschl himself.

B. THROUGH HIDDENNESS TO REVELATION

In the historical work of Karl Holl and Ferdinand Kattenbusch, Luther's *deus absconditus* receives more sympathetic treatment than in the works of other members of the Ritschlian school. No longer is it conceived as directly dependent upon and derived from scholastic thought. In the case of Kattenbusch, there is an attempt not only to elaborate the relation of hiddenness and revelation as found in Luther's writings, but also to

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 210.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 203.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 227.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 203.
[39] *Ibid.*, footnote, p. 246.

develop it for his own theological thinking. Karl Holl generally agrees with Ritschl in the understanding of scholastic thought.[40] He also agrees that Luther introduced new elements into theology and returned to primitive Christianity and to St. Paul.[41] But the decisive point of difference is that he insists that Luther's idea of the hidden God, whatever its relation to scholasticism, belongs primarily to the original creative side of Luther. The idea that God has no law over himself and that what he does is right because he does it, declares Holl, sounds like Ockham, but means the exact opposite for Luther.[42] It means that God is right and that some day the meaning of right may become clear. Further it means that the righteousness of God is evident in that he is not bound by law; but the exclusion of law does not cancel God's definite and trustworthy character.[43] In this sense Luther is not a nominalist.

Holl points out that this pattern is most clearly expressed in Luther's analysis of predestination, a concept which he thinks Luther wanted to escape but could not. This inability he finds partly based on the experience of Luther that God demands impossible things and punishes man for not doing them, and partly on a suspicion that God's gift of salvation to some and his rejection of others has no real basis. The latter seriously raised the question of the nature of God's will, but Luther was unwilling to accept the notion of a capricious and arbitrary God. The nominalistic solution which placed both God's will to save and God's activity in salvation into the framework of a capricious God is rejected. Holl then points out that Luther already suggested a solution to his problem in *de vocatione gentium*, where there is the distinction between the revealed and the secret will of God. In Holl's opinion, this solution does not belong to the thought of

[40] Karl Holl, *"Was Verstand Luther unter Religion?"* in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, Band I, p. 4.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[43] *Ibid*, p. 42.

Ockham and nominalism. The latter places God above law and makes him arbitrary; this is not part of Luther. In contrast to Ockham, Luther affirmed God's righteousness though the character of righteousness remained hidden.[44] In this analysis of Luther, hiddenness is related to a God whose workings man cannot understand, and against whom he is tempted to rebel, but who is nevertheless affirmed as righteous in dealing with man.

Holl particularly emphasizes this interpretation in his article on the concept of justification in Luther's commentary on Romans.[45] In it he affirms that for Luther, righeousness was intimately connected with trust. The rationale of the connection arises out of the problem of predestination and revelation. At first it appears that Holl is following Ritschl in the declaration that the connection of mystery, hiddenness, or concealment with predestination in Luther's thought is still in the line of Augustine and the scholastics. But he immediately declares that Luther orientated the problem in a different direction through his insistence that the mystery of election can only be thought about after one has seen the wonders of Christ. Election is thus related to faith, and faith implies "having." But this "having," says Holl, is primarily a consolation to the weak, and is therefore not completely adequate to explain Luther's own feelings. The majesty of God makes it impossible to place complete confidence between God and man. The great man of faith must be ready to accept his possible rejection if that should be God's will. Further, he must accept it, not only as right but as the manifestation of God's love. The latter is not to be confused with the thought of the mystics and the anonymous mystical tract *Theologia Germanica.* Holl admits that Luther was influenced by the mystics and perhaps by nominalists who held similar views, but

[44] *Ibid.,* pp. 40-42.

[45] Karl Holl, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre in Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief mit besonderer Rucksicht auf die Frage der Heilsgewissheit* in *Gesammelte Aufsätze,* pp. 125-28.

he proclaims that the result stands in marked contrast. For the mystics, *resignatio ad infernum* (resignation to damnation) was categorically accepted. But its meaning was not taken seriously, since they felt confident of an eventual security in eternity. For Luther, suggests Holl, the concept was less necessary but more serious. The *resignatio ad infernum* was conditional upon the idea, "if it be God's will." But because it concerned the possibility of rejection, it was taken with the utmost seriousness.

Exactly in this context Holl stresses the meaning of trust in Luther's thought. As faith in Christ is essential, so trust is expected where God does not reveal himself and remains hidden. Just as faith is not self-evident, but a venture, so trust is a venture. The implication of hiddenness is that that which lies behind revelation is not caprice or arbitrariness, but can be trusted to the same extent as revelation even though one does not understand it. In this way the terribleness of predestination is accepted, if not explained. The hidden God, though one is not able to understand him, is not different from the revealed God.

Holl finds an analogous situation in the way Luther relates wrath and love. He writes that if there were no wrath, God would not concern Luther.[46] But God's wrath in itself does not concern him. It is important as the pathway to a new knowledge of God. Holl feels that Luther wanted to put God's wrath and love on the same level inasmuch as he experienced the strength of both, but that he finally felt compelled not merely to see a unity between them but to place wrath on a lower level. This led to the distinction between God's own work of love and his strange work of wrath, in which the latter is in the service of the former. Technically, this is known in Luther as the *deus alienus* (strange God), as against the *deus proper* (God as he is in himself). Holl's point is that in this sense wrath is the agency through which man is led to God's love. It is the

[46] Karl Holl, "*Was verstand Luther unter Religion?*" p. 25.

medium whereby man's spirit is broken and he is led to accept God as love. He states, theoretically, that wrath can be the strength to destroy that which is useless, as in the concept of the last judgment. Or it can be an ostensible breaking of man in the guise of destruction, but which in reality is the path to a new life. The latter is the real work of wrath. It is "the mask under which God hides himself. It belongs to God's essence that he reveals himself in his opposite. But he does this not because of a mood, but according to a definite plan." [47] Hence it is that Holl sees in Luther's view of God's wrath, the hidden God at work, according to his purpose. God's wrath appears different than it is, and this is its hiddenness. It appears terrible but is actually a work of mercy.

Holl maintains that Luther's understanding of wrath in this form did not mean that he took it less seriously. It was not merely a psychological experience; it had an objective character. This he finds confirmed in Luther's periods of *Anfechtung*, or the temptation to despair, which gripped him from time to time. It was in these periods that Luther felt, not the devil wrestling with him, but God himself in his wrath. It was so real that Luther often thought it to be the end. But exactly at that point God often spoke in such a direct way that this terrible God again appeared not to have been the real God. Here the leap of faith was the true solace, usually in Christ but at times even apart from him. This seeing through wrath to God's positive nature, declares Holl, marks the transition to the great Reformation conception of God. "Luther looks through the darkness and storm of God's wrath into God's will of love, and perceives, as he so wonderfully expresses it, under and above the 'no' the deep, secret 'yes' that God speaks to him." [48]

God's speaking is, of course, his declaration of love for man.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

It affirms the innermost heart of God himself, who acts and completely gives himself. This is the wonderfulness of God, and his hidden character is allied with his activity in leading men to this point. Hiddenness is therefore related to the revelation of God as love, but it is not identical with its visible manifestation. The love of God is revealed but it is also at work in hidden ways. Love at work in strange ways is God's hiddenness. In this respect, Holl could conclude that Luther believed that God works in and through all things, and that he hides himself in creatures and in their works, but always in the service of his real task.[49]

Holl's analysis of Luther is generally most appreciative. This is to be expected inasmuch as he is not only a sympathetic historian but also consciously accepts Luther's motifs as decisive for his own thought. Nevertheless Holl is a Ritschlian in his understanding of the content of revelation and God's positive activity. Neither in the analysis of Luther nor in his own thinking does he genuinely develop the concept of love past Ritschl's understanding. He does affirm that forgiveness stands at the center of Luther's thought while for the scholastics it stood alongside other factors, including merit. He also speaks of Luther's emphasis on the incomprehensible wonder that God offers his forgiveness, thereby meeting a justifiable rejection of man. But there is no development of this aspect. Holl actually affirms that the religion of forgiveness can be translated into the religion of conscience.[50]

In his own theological thinking, Holl feels that he is departing to an appreciable degree not only from Ritschl but from Ritschlian thought. He is opposed to any view of Christianity which bases redemption upon the likeness of the soul with God, or upon the indestructible reality of mankind. Without categorically attributing such views to Ritschl, he nevertheless states that "it

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

is in the highest degree misleading when, since Albrecht Ritschl, . . . 'the infinite worth of the human soul' is stressed as a fundamental doctrine of Christianity." [51] He departs from the Ritschlian analysis in rejecting the thesis of Harnack's *History of Dogma*, "that the history of the church exhibits a constant falling away from the purity of the original gospel." [52] This does not mean, however, that he agrees with any view which insists upon steady progress in dogma and in the history of the church, as does the Hegelian school. But it is clear that he feels he is breaking new ground.

Jesus, he says, sees a deep gulf between God and man. The gospel is concerned with the "fact that man has forfeited his worth but that nevertheless God accepts him." [53] Most theologians have seen "somethng incomprehensible, a real miracle, a pure act of grace" in the incarnation, which is real for the man who feels the moral gap between God and himself.[54] This means that God takes the initiative.

In spite of these statements, there is finally a very close connection between forgiveness and morality in Holl's thinking. Out of forgiveness emerges a morality characterized by a warm relation to God and by taking Jesus as its example. It is precisely this connection which makes Christianity so convincing for Holl. The irrational in the preaching of Jesus is not significant; from the pardoning and sustaining grace of God, one must move on to man's activity. Nowhere is this more evident for Holl than in the writings of St. Paul. Accepting God's forgiveness, Paul proceeded to stress the place of an ethic and to work out his salvation.[55]

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[51] Karl Holl, *The Distinctive Elements of Christianity*, p. 17.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 41. This interpretation is denied, Holl contends, by Barth and Kierkegaard (p. 42) who misrepresent Paul. Apart from Barth or Kierkegaard, one can raise the question whether Paul even considered obedience

Holl finds that the gospel and the Torah have a similar relation. The former cancels the latter only in the interest of a higher morality, that is, the law of the spirit or of Christ. Further, the gospel not only points to this higher morality but mediates the strength for its fulfillment. It is not a surprise therefore when Holl declares that the ethic which followed from Paul's experience of the cross is for him the "final and complete solution of the enigma of the cross." [56]

Although Holl was dissatisfied with the work of Ritschl, he emphasizes the central place of morality in the gospel of salvation more than Ritschl does. The latter at least denies that the fundamental element is morality, though he feels it to be an integral one. Holl, wishing to emphasize the miracle of grace, proceeds from this point to an emphasis upon the ethical as the determinative factor in relation to salvation. It is as if the elliptical character of Ritschl's thought had been transformed into a circle, of which the center is a single point in which grace is determined by morality.

The implications of this point are important. The emphasis which Holl puts upon the miracle of God's grace might have served as a framework for understanding the hiddenness of God. But its development was prematurely arrested by moral considerations which finally won the ascendance in man's relation to God. This had its effect also upon his study of Luther, in which conscience and forgiveness are equated and in which forgiveness is often spoken of without a Christological reference. No less a student of Holl than Wilhelm Pauck writes that he

> . . . interpreted Luther's religion in terms of Kantian and Ritschlian moralism, . . . that he . . . "modernized" Luther by his failure to

—which he felt essential—as the ground on which one worked out one's salvation. Is it not significant that the admonition of "fear and trembling" has been omitted in the working out of one's salvation?

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

recognize the impact of the traditional dogma, especially the Christological one, upon Luther's mind.[57]

It can be safely said of Holl, that in his own thought and in his interpretation of Luther, the *deus absconditus* could not be equated with the *deus in carne* (God incarnate) because the latter is not sufficiently crucial. The grace of God is real for Holl, but there is no identification of grace with the incarnation except as it points to grace. In his own thought, the hidden God has no real place. In his interpretation of Luther, hiddenness is applied to God's wrath, in the service of that grace which is the basis of the new morality. Thus Holl's advance over Ritschl consists in sympathetically exploring hiddenness in Luther's thought in respect to predestination and wrath, under the criterion of love. The concepts, however, do not yet come into decisive theological focus.

C. THE EQUATION OF HIDDENNESS AND REVELATION

Ferdinand Kattenbusch, like Karl Holl, is not perturbed by the relation of Luther to the scholastics. Although he mentions the scholastic terms used by Luther he does not develop Luther's use of them. The decisive point for him is not their use by Luther but how he understood them.[58] This is most clearly illustrated for him in the problem which plagued Ritschl, namely, the nature of God above law (*exlex*).

It was noted earlier that Ritschl attacked Theodosius Harnack for suggesting that God as *exlex* did not mean the absence of standard, but a standard beyond man's ideas of meaning and comprehension. Here Kattenbusch follows T. Harnack rather than Ritschl. In Luther's thought Kattenbusch finds that God's measure or standard is applicable even to what he has not re-

[57] Wilhelm Pauck, "The Historiography of the German Reformation during the past Twenty Years," in *Church History*, December, 1940, p. 311.
[58] Ferdinand Kattenbusch, *Deus Absconditus bei Luther*, in *Festgabe für Julius Kaftan*, p. 170.

vealed.[59] Although the context of Kattenbusch's statement does not show, as does Holl's, whether or not the standard would be recognizable to man if God had chosen to reveal himself at these points, the implication nevertheless is that God's act is consistently directed rather than capricious or arbitrary. Even when Luther spoke of the freedom of God, contends Kattenbusch, God had a reason (*ratio*) in his dealing with man. With the flavor of vengeance he adds that the idea that God acts capriciously is only possible if one has the opposite notion as his presupposition, namely law. He affirms also that Luther suggested a common ethical tie which connects God and man, without denying the lordship of God.[60] One can surmise how happy Ritschl would have been had he found the latter in Luther's thought.

Kattenbusch, like Holl, does not agree with Luther's ideas on predestination. It is not that he thinks that the doctrine is the remnant of scholasticism. It is because he believes that hiddenness is a sort of knowledge in Luther's idea of predestination. Maintaining that the problem of predestination does not mean knowing whether or not one is saved, Kattenbusch nevertheless suggests that the assertion that some will be damned and others saved, quite apart from merit, implies "relative knowing" rather than hiddenness. But Luther could not escape this because it appeared as a part of the scriptural word.[61] In respect to double predestination, Kattenbusch thinks Luther never abandoned that idea, though he was not emphatic about it in any way. He held it as a possibility which had to be taken seriously.[62]

Kattenbusch's analysis of Luther on this point can be formulated as follows: In the idea of predestination hiddenness consists in not knowing the "why" behind the "knowing" of its

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 179.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 190-92.
[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.
[62] *Ibid.*, pp. 201-2.

operation. In the idea of double predestination, hiddenness applies not merely to the "why" but also to its possible operation. The latter cannot be categorically affirmed, but it is probable enough to create concern. This concern does not mean that one can seek an explanation; rather one must be prepared to accept it. Such an interpretation is, of course, rejected by Ritschl, Loofs, and Harnack.

From a slightly different perspective, Kattenbusch speaks of the mystery of God behind revelation as so great that God cannot reveal himself in his entirety. This he finds illustrated in Luther's use of scholastic terms, such as naked (*nudus*) and absolute (*absolutus*) which indicate that God is so much greater than man can imagine that if he were known in his complete self, man would be blinded by his dazzling brightness. But he adds this does not mean that God is different from his revelation. Therefore faith must accept that God will remain incomprehensible in this life, though trust is necessary in that which is not revealed. Apparent contradictions, such as the discrepancy between what God is in actuality and what man can grasp, or aspects of the problem of predestination, are solved for Luther on the basis of the affirmation that God is just in his dealing with man.[63]

Such an analysis places the hiddenness of God in quite a different relation to the problem of predestination than in the case of the interpretation of Luther by Ritschl, Loofs, and Harnack. It is no longer the unfortunate "hang-over" which stands side by side with the new concept of the love of God; it is rather the correlate of revelation and faith.

Kattenbusch however is primarily concerned to show that Luther made a more direct connection of revelation and hiddenness. He points out that for Luther God is hidden at the point of revelation as well as behind revelation. This means that the essence of faith is in things not seen, according to Luther's analy-

[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 204-6.

sis of Hebrews 11:1. Revelation implies knowledge but not sight. Revelation as correlated with faith does not eliminate the hidden; hiddenness in fact means that faith alone stands between God and man.[64]

Kattenbusch further clarifies the correlation of revelation and hiddenness by stressing that for Luther hiddenness was possible only because of revelation. One must begin with the given, or there would be no hiddenness. If there is no revelation, there would be ignorance of the unknown God.[65] For Luther revelation was thus the precondition of hiddenness.[66]

The meaning which Kattenbusch finds in the relation of revelation and hiddenness is, however, not confined to this structural analysis. The real point is that revelation introduces mysteries and depths too great for man's comprehension. This Kattenbusch believes, was the most distinctive meaning of the hidden God for Luther. Nothing but the greatness of revelation made Luther's concern with the *deus absconditus* so crucial. God's revelation overwhelms man and appears so differently than expected, that a new riddle or enigma of its own emerges.

Although Kattenbusch does not analyze the nature of that enigma in detail, he declares that it is the love which is revealed through Christ.[67] The riddle, or the ungraspable, lies in the wonder of the love which is revealed in Christ to the sinner. In this manner the God revealed in flesh (*deus in carne revelatus*) is the *deus absconditus*. Here the emphasis, suggests Kattenbusch, is no longer with the hidden will of God who condemns

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[66] Because of this fact, Kattenbusch would like to replace the word *verborgen* with *verstellen* in his understanding of Luther and in his own work. *Verborgen*, he declares, does not make clear that revelation or giveness precedes; its connotation is too close to the unknown. To this one can only add that the word *verstellen* has difficulties just as insurmountable. Although Kattenbusch implies that *verstellen* means "disguise" or "in place of," the word more often has the meaning of pretense, or of betrayal, particularly in its reflexive character. Certainly this is the exact opposite of Kattenbusch's intention.

some and saves others. Rejection now would be accepted as graspable; the ungraspable is that God loves man and saves him.[68]

What Luther had in mind, suggests Kattenbusch, is that love cannot be measured by human findings, standards, or thoughts.[69] The mystery of God is that in him person and love are so closely connected.[70] His majesty and his hiddenness consist in this love.[71] In this formulation the *deus absconditus* reaches its highest expression, without any semblance of capriciousness.

The conjunction of revelation and hiddenness then does not eliminate hiddenness apart from revelation. But it does qualify its meaning. In a sense this is the type of development which Ritschl had in mind, but which he neither saw in Luther nor developed himself, since he had no feeling for the mystery of love. How far Kattenbusch takes this development of Luther seriously for his own work will concern us presently. Suffice it to say here that the connection of revelation and hiddenness is affirmed as central in Luther, but is the least developed in Kattenbusch's analysis. Nowhere does Kattenbusch carefully examine the meaning of revelation and faith. He only declares that it exemplifies the wonder of God's love.

The same difficulty emerges in his own thinking on the hidden God though it must always be remembered that he is the only one of the Ritschlians to attempt a strict correlation of revelation and hiddenness. This is undoubtedly partly due to the fact that his life span (Kattenbusch died in 1936) made him come to grips with the thinking of such men as Paul Tillich, Rudolf Otto, and Karl Barth.

Kattenbusch specifically gives his own views in an article, *Das Unbedingte und der Unbegreifbare*, written primarily against

[67] Kattenbusch, *Deus Absconditus bei Luther*, p. 193.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 213.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 214.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 214.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

the views of Paul Tillich.[72] For the present purpose, it is not necessary to give the details of his critique of Tillich and his philosophy of religion. As a true son of Ritschl, it is to be expected that Kattenbusch draws a sharp line between theology and philosophy. That this brings a negative attitude toward the word "unconditioned," quite apart from what content is implied therein, also is not surprising. And that the lumping together of the concept "unconditioned" with philosophy in general fails to appreciate that this designation was intended to overcome philosophy as well, need not detain us in spite of its inaccuracy. For the present purposes, the article is significant for the light which it throws upon the way in which Kattenbusch develops the idea of the hidden God in relation to his own theological presuppositions.

It is, however, suggestive for the uncovering of the presupposition of Kattenbusch to note the chief reason why he cannot accept the word "unconditioned." He feels that the only ascriptions which are applicable to God are judgment and grace, and that even these do not suggest a sufficiently determined and moral character. For him the "unconditioned" means the elimination of all value judgments. It, more than other terms, stands too far beyond man's scale of values.[73]

Kattenbusch does raise the question whether the term "unconditioned," as used by Kant and Fichte, does not have a moral element in contradistinction to an "absolute" use connoting "without condition."[74] But he contends that the real problem would remain unchanged. Morality and conscience are significant for him only in the context of the revelation of God as

[72] F. Kattenbusch *Das Unbedingte und der Unbegreifbare, Theologische Studien und Kritiken, drittes/viertes Heft,* vol. 98-99, 1926. It is somewhat amusing to note that Kattenbusch wanted to direct the article against Barth as well. But he confesses he spent so much time on Tillich that he had space only for a few words on Barth.

[73] *Ibid.,* p. 394.

[74] *Ibid.,* pp. 375-79.

the conjunction of "love" and "person." For Kattenbusch, value judgment must be related to "person." In this respect he is more insistent than Ritschl, for whom "person" often appeared as an appendage to the value judgment or, at best, as the object concerning which judgment is made. In fact, the mystery of personality for Kattenbusch consists in the relation of morality to individuality, or the "ought" which man feels over himself but which in reality is a part of himself.[75]

The significant factor for Kattenbusch is what this means for the starting point of theology, and where, on this basis, hiddenness finds its true character. Revelation as the domain of "love" and "person" concretely means the following. First, God is known in the domain of "person"; secondly, "person" is related to "love" in the moral sense; and thirdly, to "love" belongs a determined character, though not compulsion or the denial of freedom.[76] In this way Kattenbusch calls attention to the character of God as love and at the same time indicates a necessary and intimate connection with the concept of "person." The mystery of "person" is thus connected with a definite nature, exemplified in love. It was noted that in his discussion of Luther, Kattenbusch mentions the significance of the connection of "love" and "person" in the understanding of hiddenness. Kattenbusch declares that in the concept of "person" Luther found that combination of force and freedom in love which makes it a genuine mystery. In this way, says Kattenbusch, the *deus absconditus* is analogous to what we moderns call the moral consciousness in relation to a moral person as such,[77] in other words, the relation of one's nature to the mystery of being.

Such a conjunction of nature and mystery, of "love" and "person," is most clearly and fully expressed in Christ. In himself, he is the revelation of God in that he shows us that God

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 402.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 394.

[77] Kattenbusch, *Deus Absconditus bei Luther*, p. 193.

is love and how he is love.[78] And the hidden God is the moral consciousness of Jesus expressed in the conjunction of "love" and "person." It is not untrue to Kattenbusch to say that hiddenness is the mystery of the personality of God expressed in love. However, the crucial question still is, how God is love. Kattenbusch leaves one in the greatest obscurity here, since he does not go beyond the assertion that God is love. The most that he says is that man will never grasp that God has come to men who are unworthy, and that therefore in faith man may call himself among the elect.[79] From this perspective he says the problem of theodicy is negligible.[80] This is suggestive, but hardly convincing, without clarification.

For Kattenbusch, as for Ritschlian thought generally, the love of God is related to forgiveness only in that God releases man from bondage to sin and frees him for new work. Jesus announces this view concerning God and in it is exemplified the greatness of his love. That God reveals himself in his personal way is what makes him truly *"der Unbegreifbare."* One does not know why God should be this way. It is simply his wonderful attitude toward men who are never deserving. It is for the most part self-evident in its nature, if not in its "why," to those who wish to see it.

In summary, Ritschl and the Ritschlian historians rejected Luther's *deus absconditus* as the vestige of scholastic thought. Ritschl, in contrast to Loofs and Harnack, expressed an interest in the problem but did not develop it. Furthermore, he had no place for it in the context of his thinking. Holl and Kattenbusch both attempt to understand Luther's *deus absconditus* as a concept in its own right, developed meaningfully for his own thought whatever its connection with scholasticism. Holl sees the concept primarily as implying the strange but merciful work of God

[78] Kattenbusch, *Das Unbedingte und der Unbegreifbare*, p. 406.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 416.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 416.

in driving and leading men to see God in his real work as merciful. Kattenbusch also develops this aspect but insists that even more important is Luther's equation of the *deus revelatus* (God revealed) and the *deus absconditus.* He attempts also to develop this relation in his own thinking by pointing to the mystery of the love of God.

In this development from Ritschl to Kattenbusch, new ground has undoubtedly been broken within the Ritschlian movement in the work of the latter. But it does not take much theological wisdom to see that in all of these men there is an "at homeness" of God with man. Man, simply because of his limited nature, cannot see the full wonder of God in the world. At most there is the mystery of a God who loves one more than one knows and whose wrath one need not fear. The doctrine of revelation in Ritschlian thought, even in those who felt that they had overcome it, is that Jesus Christ is the revealer of God. What he reveals is that God will pardon man for his guilt, thereby releasing him for his work in the world. Through this one is elevated as a spiritual and moral person above the world and therefore into fellowship and communion with God.

In such an approach, it is difficult to see the necessity of the concept of the hidden God. Even when hiddenness is mentioned, it is not a crucial concept. The Ritschlian movement, to be sure, places Jesus Christ at the center of theology again, and stresses the place of God's forgiveness as the point of departure for theological thinking. But it does not connect forgiveness with the unheard of miracle of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.[81] It was only when Jesus Christ was thought of as the revealed as well as

[81] Julius Kaftan and Wilhelm Hermann, also two prominent men in the Ritschlian movement, speak of the hidden God as the incomprehensible mercy of God. But it is clear here also that the concept in the last analysis is similar to that developed in Kattenbusch though it must be said that the writing of both preceded the latter. For the relevant sections, see Julius Kaftan, *The Truth of the Christian Religion,* vol. 2, pp. 388-411, and Wilhelm Hermann, *The Communion of the Christian with God,* pp. 135, 137, 141, 187; *Systematic Theology,* pp. 12, 98, 99, 113, 128.

the revealer that revelation and its correlate could again take on a significant role.

Before entering into a consideration of this problem, it is necessary to indicate the new ground which is broken by other lines of interpretation of Luther. It will then be noted that the two poles of Ritschlian interpretation of Luther, one of which places hiddenness on a scholastic basis, and the other of which sees hiddenness in conjunction with the nature of God as love, are both untrue to the thought of Luther himself. It will also be obvious that in this new direction, additional frontiers of thinking are opened. But it must never be forgotten that it is in the Ritschlian movement that Christian theology gained its right to stand on its own feet again, and that the doctrine of hiddenness at least emerged as a problem for Christian thinking. It must also not be forgotten that in Kattenbusch one sees the intimate connection of hiddenness with revelation, however defective his understanding of revelation.

Chapter II

NUANCES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF LUTHER

In the previous chapter, attention was focused on the Ritschlian interpretation of the hiddenness of God in Luther and the doubtful place of hiddenness in the thought of the Ritschlian historians. Significant but divergent attempts to understand the concept in Luther's use were explored in the writings of Karl Holl and Ferdinand Kattenbusch. The suggestive but indecisive analysis of hiddenness and revelation in Kattenbusch's historical and systematic writings was emphasized as a significant step toward a proper understanding of the *deus absconditus*.

In the introduction we pointed out that research into the thought of Luther played a more decisive part in the recovery of theological vitality than is usually assumed. In fact, the first opposition to the Ritschlian movement of any importance came from historians who were critical of the historical and interpretative work of the Ritschlian school. Some of these, such as Reinhold Seeberg, author of the well-known textbook on the history of doctrine, were themselves still Ritschlians. Others, such as Karl Heim, had departed from Ritschlian motifs in their thinking. But they are united in their opposition to the way in which Ritschl, Loofs, and Harnack interpreted the history of

Christian thought. They particularly objected to the bifurcation of Luther into the "new" and "old" and attributed this distinction to the antimetaphysical bias of the liberal historians. For the most part they are sympathetic to Luther's use of medieval categories. From the perspective of Luther's understanding of faith they see a fundamental unity in his thought. They are more positive even than Holl and Kattenbusch in the understanding of the problem of predestination and God's wrath. In fact, the relation of hiddenness and revelation takes on increasing depths with a different conception of the motifs of Luther's thought.

The insights thus obtained were generally used in their own thinking. Theirs was not an antiquarian interest—it was a passion in itself, conditioned partly by historical forces and partly by a genuine desire to get at the basis of Protestant thought. The inner compulsions of practically every German historian of theology, and of theologians who are not primarily historians, to study Luther and to use him for systematic purposes is hard for Anglo-Saxons to understand. But without accepting this as a fact, little can be understood of German theology.[1]

This does not imply that there is unanimity in the interpretation of Luther or in the resultant theological views. Quite the contrary is the case. The unity which exists is primarily one of opposition to previous interpretations. Nevertheless, new vistas of interpretation appear which are tremendously significant. Attention is here focused upon them in so far as they contribute toward significant aspects of the *deus absconditus*.

A. LUTHER AND THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

In spite of Ritschl's vigorous objections to Luther's relation to scholasticism, whether in its classic or nominalist form, he admits that Luther used nominalist categories with the intent of over-

[1] Paul Tillich once said to the writer that he thought he was one of the few German theologians who had not written on Luther. Tillich however has been tremendously influenced by Luther as he himself admits.

coming its Pelagian character. The only conclusion which one can draw from Ritschl's attitude is that Luther should have ignored nominalism, which was the world in which he lived, and worked in an independent way. As a matter of fact, Luther succumbed less to the spirit of nominalism than Ritschl did to that of the Enlightenment. Holl and Kattenbusch, on the other hand, insist on Luther's independent place in the context of the medieval world. But their interpretation lacks completeness through their isolation of particular problems, such as God as *exlex,* predestination, and wrath. One still gathers the impression that they would have preferred Luther to cut the knot from all medieval categories though they were unwilling to challenge his integrity.

Karl Heim provides the most suggestive, comprehensive approach to Luther's relation to the medieval world. Without surrendering the uniqueness of Luther, he shows his partial dependence upon but actual transformation of the medieval world. To substantiate this, he points to the problems of the medieval period. In it, two major streams of thought fought with each other in the hope of claiming and maintaining the allegiance of the church.[2] In the early middle ages, the neoplatonic line with its emphasis upon the mystical grew naturally within the framework of the church and became a part of its official thought. Aristotelianism, although it had a more difficult time gaining the ascendancy, nevertheless was triumphant by the time of the classic middle ages. Upon its triumph, the mystical stream was not excluded from theological thought. It was kept alongside the Aristotelian emphasis in what seemed a natural though uneasy alliance.[3]

In the subsequent breakdown of this alliance of reason and the nonrational, the mystical, neoplatonic stream did not regain as-

[2] The major burden of what follows can be found in Karl Heim, *Das Gewissheitsproblem in der systematischen Theologie bis zu Schleiermacher.*

[3] As in Aquinas.

cendancy. Instead, scholasticism in its nominalistic form, with its beginning in Duns Scotus and its classic expression in Ockham, came to the fore. With it came a distrust of reason and a greater emphasis upon the authority of the church in the wide domain of thought now filled exclusively by revelation. The mystical, neoplatonic thought did not disappear, however. It remained side by side with nominalism. The tension between it and scholastic nominalism was greater however than that between neoplatonism and scholasticism proper.

In this analysis, Heim suggests that the mystical, neoplatonic thought continued throughout as one of the main lines, while the second line, starting in the recovering of Aristotle, had another facet in nominalism. When the latter overcame the former,[4] the already uneasy alliance of the two lines turned into an antithesis of contending forces.[5] The notion of necessary opposites for the sake of a greater unity was threatened outright. Thus philosophy and theology, revelation and reason, faith and works, grace as forgiveness and grace as infused power, objectivity and subjectivity, knowledge and will, *verum* (the true) and *bonum* (the good), revelation and authority—all were found in such conflict with one another that their alliance was one of appearance only. The complementary nature of revelation and reason turned into opposition between the two. Even the unity of revelation and authority, which in their alliance had helped revelation win its victory over reason, was threatened though not destroyed by Ockham's principle that revelation and scriptural authority were supreme over the authority of the pope.[6]

Heim finds that this situation furnished Luther with all the material for his own thought. Certain factors were already in

[4] Heim also indicates that the picture is even more complicated, in that the mystical stream has contradictions within itself, while scholasticism also had many sides.

[5] Heim, *Das Gewissheitsproblem in der systematischen Theologie bis zu Schleiermacher*, p. 227.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

the air. The authority of Scripture against reason had already been formulated by Ockham. The theory of double truth in philosophy and theology—that that which is true in philosophy is not true in theology—was expressed in nominalism. The stress upon the operation of God's grace as the ground of salvation was a part of the late middle ages' emphasis on the mystical dwelling of God in the soul.[7]

Heim does not mean that Luther simply borrowed these elements of the late medieval picture. In no sense did Luther continue the line of late scholasticism.[8] The setting of theology over philosophy in the Ockhamist sense was not a cornerstone in Luther's thought, as Ritschl suggested. Luther never used this as a point of departure although he incorporated its meaning. Rather there was a completely new intuition concerning the relation of Scripture, revelation, and Christ to the philosophical enterprise. Likewise the mystical element was not simply accepted. It was radically transformed by providing its transcendent aspect with the specific content of the oneness of men with Christ.

Heim insists that Luther's understanding of the hidden God is directly related to, but not dependent on this picture. It is dependent on his analysis of faith, from which he recast and reoriented the world of his time. The *deus absconditus*, on the one side, is related to the general scholastic picture in which the development proceeds from the hidden but definitely affirmed God of truth in the tradition of Augustine to Anselm, to the hidden mysterious will of God behind the will of God manifested in Christ. In this development, Heim finds an increasing emphasis upon hiddenness and with it, an increasing emphasis upon revelation. This development, Heim suggests, Luther experienced in his own life and recast it in faith. On the other side, Heim finds the context of hiddenness set by the mystical tradition,

[7] *Ibid.*, 235.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 235, 253.

transformed by Luther into a concrete Christ mysticism, which in no sense removed mystery but tended rather to confirm it.[9] The latter aspect will be developed in the section on revelation.

Luther, in Heim's estimation, thereby emphasized the hiddenness of God apart from Christ, and the hiddenness of God in Christ. He held on to the latter, without relinquishing the former. Instead of an uneasy alliance, the two were germane to Luther's new intuition of the problem on the basis of his experience of faith. Scholasticism proper, scholastic nominalism, and mysticism were radically recast through the living witness of Luther's faith. From such a center he combined old elements in a new way. It was not that he simply added the old elements together. So Heim concludes that Luther is to be seen neither in a vacuum nor in the midst of two conflicting streams of thought which necessarily determined his thought.

Most interpretations are either on the one side or the other of Heim's position. Typical are the two Seebergs—father and son. Reinhold Seeberg is particularly important for his frank insistence that Luther's *deus absconditus* comes directly out of the scholastic world view. In this he agrees with Ritschl. His interpretation is different and sympathetic. This is clear in his analysis of God as will. On the one side he rejects interpreting will in Luther's thought as meaning capriciousness, and on the other, as meaning the determination of God by a standard of God's own as Holl and Kattenbusch interpret Luther. Seeberg's understanding implies that will must be understood as lying between these alternatives. He concedes that Ockham's conception borders on arbitrariness in the suggestion that God could be different than he manifests himself. But he admits no more than this. In the case of Luther he asserts that there is no hint of arbitrariness. Seeberg is therefore not suggesting that Luther is simply the reduplication of Ockham. But he does suggest that Luther was directly and favorably influenced by scholasticism.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 252-55.

Seeberg believes that in Luther's thought God as will belongs to natural knowledge. On its basis, the essence of God remains unknowable and therefore excludes speculation upon God's majesty. Speculation could only result in a fearful and terrible feeling about his nature. He who takes God's unknowability seriously without speculating upon it will naturally be led to the thought that God is will or act, independent of any other will because of its essential self-determined freedom. Natural knowledge ends in God's will as inscrutable and unknowable. Therefore one cannot know why he wills as he wills. In this sense, God's will is groundless and unsearchable, though it irresistibly works and conditions all, working even through the evil, which it does not create. And God's omnipotence for Luther, contends Seeberg, consisted exactly in that he works all things, not that he could do much that does not happen. So Seeberg states that Luther finally confesses that man does not know why God works in the world, why he concerns himself with sin, or why he reveals himself.[10]

For Ritschl, such an analysis meant a capricious God. Seeberg, who directs his historical work against Ritschl, insists that the point Luther wished to emphasize is the impossibility of giving a natural ground to God, not his arbitrary character. The natural knowledge of God means in Luther that one cannot ascribe a standard for or to God. The absolute will of God does not mean capriciousness because it carries within itself both absolute freedom and absolute determination. For man, this means that God's free sovereignty is expressed in that his world order remains incomprehensible. At the same time, there is absolute necessity because what God wills necessarily occurs though it may remain hidden. Thus both the free and the determined character of God are affirmed.[11]

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[10] R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, vierter Band, erste Abteilung*, pp. 145-46.

[11] Seeberg points out that Luther's view of freedom and determination in

Seeberg further maintains that hiddenness is directly related, though not as mysteriously as in the case of will, to the character of God manifest in the order and structure of life. It is affirmed that this aspect also comes directly out of the medieval context. The hiddenness of God is present in the activity of God in the established orders of nature and life. To this area belongs Luther's designation of all creatures as God's mask or *larvae,* writes Seeberg.[12] History also belongs to this realm, since it is the area of the relative knowability of God. In all these areas, God operates in a partially hidden but ordered fashion, always with the possibility that things might have been ordered otherwise. This feeling, says Seeberg, stems directly from the scholastic distinction between the *potentia absoluta,* the absolute power of God, and the *potentia ordinata,* the ordained, ordinary, or ordered power of God, and clarifies Luther's whole thought. Luther used the term *potentia secreta* (secret power) as synonymous with *potentia absoluta.* Further Luther did not repudiate the distinction, but doubted that the term *ordinata* carried any significance for religious expression. Seeberg contends that on those occasions when Luther saw revelation in the context of this distinction, the *deus absconditus* had its fullest meaning. Then the *potentia absoluta* meant the *generalis potentia* (totality of power) which stands behind the *ordinata* of church, state, family, nature, and, particularly, the revelation in Christ. So Seeberg affirms that the *deus absconditus* in Luther is the abysmal ground of possibility behind the *ordinata,* though never in opposition to it as occasionally in the medieval interpretation.[13] The contingent character of *ordinata,* the possibility of a different ordering, is affirmed, but without the possibility of opposition between the

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the nature of God never meant the denial of the psychological freedom of man. God does not work in us without us, and although we are always conditioned by God, we do not thereby cease to be man. Hence the two levels are not to be confused.

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 156.

[13] *Ibid.,* pp. 156-59.

two. *Absconditus* and *ordinata* stand to each other in the same relation as will and revelation, the universal and the particular.[14] The preceding distinction in Luther does not, thinks Seeberg, imply a second or horrible will behind or alongside the manifest or revealed will. Such is conceivably the attitude of men who have not experienced God's expressed nature in revelation. Revelation does not change the strangeness of God but it does mean that he is not terrible.

In his two major theological writings, *The Fundamental Truth of Christian Religion* and his *Christliche Dogmatik,* Seeberg does not utilize the concept of hiddenness. But he expresses something of the motif of his analysis of Scotus and Luther in his own understanding of the relation of God and the world. In the strong feeling that God is the source of everything, Seeberg maintains a gap between the Creator and the creature which is foreign to Ritschl.[15] He is even willing to use the term "irrationality" to describe God's relation to the world, provided it is not meant in an antirational, but in a suprarational sense.[16]

What Seeberg is trying to say is that God is the source of all and related to all through his free activity. This activity does not mean capriciousness. But it does mean that man cannot apply any rational presuppositions as the ground of God's activity, because as the Creator he is the foundation of all, including man's presuppositions.[17] God as being must be conditioned by nothing else than himself.[18] Therefore his activity in the creative process or in his relation to createdness cannot be necessary but only self-willed.

Nevertheless, God's relation to the world has a positive character. It includes both his holiness and his love. The two together are revelation. Holiness as terrible otherness and love as senti-

[14] *Ibid.*, footnote, p. 159.
[15] R. Seeberg, *Christliche Dogmatik,* Vol. I, p. 94.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

mentality are equally excluded. Structurally, this analysis is in line with what one would expect from Seeberg's historical works and his theological feeling about God and the world. But it must be said here that his further analysis of love means that at this decisive point, Seeberg remains a Ritschlian.[19] Love is increasingly self-evident and less the miracle of God's act. Nevertheless his positive analysis of the concept of will and of Luther's use of concrete scholastic categories remains a positive contribution.

It is Erich Seeberg, important son of an illustrious father, who indirectly challenges the work of his father in his two volumes on Luther. In the first volume he pays scant attention to the relation of Luther to the medieval world. In the second volume he speaks more directly of Luther's use of the medieval notion of the unknowability of God or the *deus nudus* (naked Divinity). He maintains, however, that Luther's use of the unknowability of God or the *deus nudus* belongs to his later works, particularly the *Commentary on Genesis.* Without attempting to give an explanation for this development, he contends that here can be found those mystical and nominalistic elements which are at a minimum in the other writings. The *deus nudus* stems from nominalism, and the unknowable God, from both medieval mysticism and nominalism.[20] Also in the late writings he finds reference to the *potentia dei ordinata* (ordered power of God), which Reinhold Seeberg connected with the framework of the hidden God. He insists, however, that in Luther the *potentia dei ordinata* is connected with the incarnation, without particular reference to the *potentia dei absoluta* (absolute power of God).[21]

Erich Seeberg appears anxious to refute his father's thesis that the source of the hidden God in Luther springs from the scholastic

[19] R. Seeberg, *The Fundamental Truths of the Christian Religion,* pp. 233, 241-42, 251.

[20] Seeberg, Erich, *Luthers Theologie,* Vol. II, pp. 429, 431-32.

[21] *Ibid.,* p. 434.

distinction. He maintains that the scholastic terms appear only in the later works, and that even here they are not conceived in a scholastic framework. At best, he maintains, they are symbolic, and do not have the same meaning as in scholasticism. There is no speculation of any kind. When they are used, they are bridges to the conception of the revealed God who remains hidden in his revelation.[22] Seeberg's continual emphasis is that Luther moved quickly from all such reference to God hidden in Christ.

Seeberg also addresses himself to the question of the relation of Luther to pre-Reformation thought in his early and middle life. Concerning Luther's relation to both nominalism and mysticism in his early development, Seeberg is, however, generally indecisive. In considering the thought of Biel, he mentions the *potentia dei absoluta* and the *potentia dei ordinata,* but he adds that in Luther the term *ordinata* had a more definitive character than the usual meaning of that term.[23] He also suggests that there is an analogy with the *potentia absoluta* and *ordinata* in Luther's views on predestination as found in *The Bondage of the Will.* But the analogy is mentioned without elaboration and with the suggestion that the *deus absconditus* and the *deus crucifixus* (God crucified) are the hub around which the thought moves.[24] Thus, again Seeberg moves quickly from scholasticism to revelation, maintaining that the former is irrelevant for Luther.

Seeberg states that Luther followed Tauler in the view that God reveals himself in a way which appears opposite to sense and reason.[25] But the decisive point for him is the difference between Tauler and Luther. While both were concerned with the hidden and unknown God, including their working in opposites, Tauler is found to place the emphasis not upon the implied religious aspects, but upon the philosophical notion that

[22] *Ibid.,* see pp. 402-34.
[23] E. Seeberg, *op. cit.,* Vol. I, p. 22.
[24] *Ibid.,* p. 158.
[25] *Ibid.,* pp. 44-45.

God's nature is expressed through negation. For Luther, Tauler moved in the direction of Dionysius the Areopagite.[26]

But Seeberg is not completely satisfied with this remark. He states that Luther utilized the Areopagite's *via negativa* (negative way) in a passage on Romans, but ended on a note of revelation.[27] Likewise, Seeberg remembers Luther's praise of both Tauler and Dionysius the Areopagite. Perhaps his real thought is expressed in the statement that Luther's relation to these men cannot be answered with an "either/or."[28] Nowhere does he give a clear statement of the relation.[29] Instead he consistently affirms that Luther's real thought is removed from such questions and is found in Christ and the hiddenness of God manifest in him.[30]

It is obvious that for Erich Seeberg the real Luther is not found in any relation to scholasticism, so much so in fact that he continually finds himself moving from the problem more by disposition than by logical deduction. There is considerable similarity between Ritschl and Erich Seeberg in this respect. But their understanding of revelation in Luther is, as will be shown, a theological watershed. Reinhold Seeberg, on the other hand, has an intense interest in Luther's relation to scholasticism but is Ritschlian in his understanding of revelation. The analysis of Karl Heim is by far the most suggestive, but it is sketchy and leaves many important questions of detail unanswered.

B. SPECIAL MOTIFS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF HIDDENNESS

Among Scandinavian interpreters of Luther, attention is focused upon the discovery of special motifs as the clue to

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 143.
[29] In a review of the first volume of Seeberg's work on *Luthers Theologie* (*Church History*, 1929, pp. 631-34), Wilhelm Pauck raises the question as to whether or not the sources are related to each other in a comprehensive picture.
[30] E. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 144.

Luther's thought and as the medium of distinguishing what is central from what is more peripheral.[31]

Although this procedure is not typical of German writers, three divergent types of interpretation of Luther provide keys for the understanding of hiddenness. The first is the emphasis that God is to be understood as the working reality behind and in the world of man. It is expounded by Emanuel Hirsch.[32] The second, represented by Erich Seeberg, is a vigorous emphasis upon God's disclosure of himself in antithesis, in what he calls the "metaphysics of opposites" in the nature of revelation. The third, which in many ways is related to the second, is the insistence that the theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*) is central. It is emphasized particularly by Paul Althaus and Werner Elert.

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[31] For an excellent exposition of this movement, see E. M. Carlson, *The Reinterpretation of Luther* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948).

[32] Emanuel Hirsch started as a most promising historian and theologian. His early work on Luther, upon which the present exposition is based, compares favorably with the bulk of research upon Luther. He began, however, to see a close connection between Christianity, defined in Reformation terms, and the trials and promises of the German nation. He concluded that Christianity in Reformation terms would be destroyed if Germany as a nation was defeated. He spoke of the hiddenness of God in the sufferings of the German nation during the First World War and since that war. By shifting the emphasis slightly he was able to insist upon a close connection between the German people and God's working in the world. The hidden connection manifested in the conjunction of Protestant and German history became the basis for supporting the German revival in the interest of the revival of theology. This development is perhaps not unrelated to the lack of a decisive doctrine of revelation in his interpretation of Luther. Further, the concept of hiddenness is meaningful in the context of the problem of theodicy, but not in that of ethics defined as man's responsibility. Many Christians in Germany found comfort in the hidden God in the midst of their afflictions, but did not make this the ground of their ethics. Bishop Otto Dibelius revealed the opposite reaction of Hirsch in speaking of the despair of the German people in a speech at Union Theological Seminary in the fall of 1947. "In this situation there is only the God whose purposes we cannot know, but yet must trust. That there must be some sense in the senseless is all that we can affirm." For relevant material, see E. Hirsch, *Die Gegenwärtige geistige Lage* (Gottingen und Ruprecht, 1934), pp. 44, 49-70, 72, 73, 75, 102-3, 104-5, 135. See also Paul Means, *Things That are Caesar's* pp. 150-51, and Nils Ehrenström, *Christian Faith and the Modern State,* pp. 76ff. For an ex-

At the center of Luther's thought, Hirsch finds the idea of lordship, expressed in the concept omnipotence. He points out, however, that omnipotence is defined as *Allwirksamkeit,* which is interpreted to mean that God works all things in all, now and eschatologically. It means further that God's activity cannot be defined by the standard of men precisely because the creature is a product of God's all-working. God is the free Lord over all things, as the One who binds all things together, but is himself not bound.[33]

According to Hirsch, Luther saw the hidden God in his all-working character. Such splendor was incomprehensible to him and had the connotation of a secret work in which one could see only the complete acts of God as they moved before him. The why and where of his work was completely impenetrable, and the secret of his all-wise will was not open to man.[34]

Contrary to the Ritschlian interpretation, Hirsch insists that this mystery is necessary for any positive elaboration of Luther's doctrine of God. Instead of calling all knowledge into question, it establishes its possibility. That God is related to all activity means that man cannot escape God. This ought to be a comfort for him in his life. And since it is the presupposition of trust in God, it ought not to be feared. The lordship of God in and over all, as expressed in the concept "all-working," is the cornerstone of any confidence in God though the character of that lordship may be hidden.

Through the concept "all-working," Hirsch feels that Luther was able to hold together various aspects of the nature of God which appear contradictory. It gave the possibility of combining what one knows of God as he makes himself known and what one does not know because it is not revealed. Take, for

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cellent critique of Hirsch, see Paul Tillich, "*Die Theologie des Kairos und die gegenwärtige geistige Lage,*" in *Theologische Blätter,* No. 11, 1934.

[33] E. Hirsch, *Luthers Gottesanschauung,* p. 9.

[34] *Ibid.,* p. 9.

example, says Hirsch, the concept of goodness. Whatever the manifestation of God's goodness, God's all-working is essential in order to know that God never intends anything else but goodness toward man. Further, there are many things which man does not understand and which appear other than good. Here the all-working character of God implies goodness and also its incomprehensibility for man.[35]

Hirsch maintains that such a double character of hiddenness and disclosure, in which the two are in an uneasy tension, manifests itself in Luther in every theological problem. The real problem is how the two can be held together in their apparent contradictory nature. The key for this, says Hirsch, is Luther's concept of faith as the medium which declares the veracity of God on every level. The gap between God's Word and the unseeable essence behind it is bridged by trust on every level of its appearance.

Hirsch's interpretation therefore points to faith and trust as the necessary element which holds together the revealed and hidden nature of God in Luther's thought. For Luther,

> Justifying grace reveals to us the hidden character of earthly tribulations. In like manner, the eternal glory reveals to us the meaning of God's election hidden in grace. In the meantime we exercise faith here as there, while we hold fast the knowledge of God's eternal love bestowed upon us over against the impenetrable mysteries.[36]

In further analysis of Luther, Hirsch connects the goodness of God with his justifying acts, and his will with election. The former is declared his essence, as made clear to men; the latter, his activity, shown to man as mystery. But the point is the same, for in this tension lies man's knowledge of God—the revealed and the hidden step apart. Only in a valiant faith, declares Hirsch, can Luther encompass God's intention and God's word, thereby holding together the hidden and the revealed.[37]

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

The motif which Hirsch suggests for the understanding of Luther is fully adequate for explaining and reconciling diverse aspects. The foundation of faith as the state in which all things are unified, because all stems from God's all-working, is however not made clear. Hirsch's analysis is primarily theocentric rather than Christocentric and this is precisely the way in which he feels Luther must be understood.[38] Most current interpretation points to the primacy of the *theologia crucis*. Although it would be possible to reinterpret Hirsch's concept through such a point of departure, exponents of the primary importance of the Christocentric, such as Erich Seeberg and Paul Althaus, are not interested in the type of structural analysis provided by Hirsch.[39]

A further important observation concerning Hirsch's analysis is that the hiddenness of God applies to the activity of God behind the revelation of himself. In this respect his interpretation is similar in structure to that of Ritschl and Seeberg. Erich Seeberg, in structure similar to Kattenbusch, insists, on the contrary, that the meaning of the *deus absconditus* must be found not only bound up with the *deus revelatus*, but within it. This is emphasized in the "metaphysics of opposites" which Erich Seeberg finds expressed and elaborated in Luther's use of the concept *spiritus*.

It signifies that true wisdom is hidden in the world, since God works in opposition, and particularly in opposition to reason. He works life in the midst of death, contrary to ordinary sight and knowledge. This is God's spirituality and involves the kind of positive hiddenness which faith alone can see. Therefore Seeberg can say that Luther equates and interchanges spirituality and hiddenness,[40] or as he declares elsewhere, "*spiritualis* and *absconditus* are identical."[41] In Seeberg's understanding of Lu-

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[39] For the problem this raises, see Chapter V., pp. 145-46.

[40] Erich Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 115.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

ther, the Spirit is the manifestation of God's way in the world. But it is never abstract or simply other. It is hidden in the concrete, through which it continually works and manifests itself.[42] Revelation means hiddenness to the eyes of the world.

To invert the metaphor, it is exactly because God works new life through opposites that the hidden ushers in revelation, or that the *deus absconditus* becomes the *deus revelatus*.[43] At the same time, the *deus revelatus* never loses its character as *deus absconditus* because of the nature of revelation. This, says Seeberg, is decisive for Luther's thought. It means that the hidden and the revealed are not two things beside each other, in which one is the background of the other, but that they are one in thought and nature.[44]

Seeberg assumes that for Luther the *deus revelatus* is Christ, or more specifically, the *deus in carne* and the *deus crucifixus*. The *deus in carne* means God is hidden in Christ, that is, in the flesh, as Seeberg says Luther was fond of expressing it.[45] This immediately means apprehension in faith or the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. For Seeberg, this eliminates the declaration that God is love, understood either in the sense of Ritschl or Kattenbusch. One does not see directly; the Spirit makes it possible to see, and without it one would not see.

The *deus crucifixus* particularly implies the paradoxical character of God's working in opposites. Life is brought out of death, contrary to all reason and sight.[46] This, says Seeberg, is the real love of which Luther spoke. It means that God works good out of evil, joy out of sorrow, triumph out of defeat, health out of suffering, mercy out of wrath, life out of death. In Seeberg's understanding, it means that God's love is revealed in hiddenness and is hidden in revelation. God as love, either in Ritschl or the

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 143. Also E. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 35.
[43] E. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 98.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 206.
[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 129. Also E. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 21-22.
[46] E. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 62-63.

Ritschlian interpretation of Luther, was not hidden in this sense, but was related directly to the processes and activities of man. In Seeberg's understanding of Luther, God also works through man; but this cannot be defined in categories which are adequate to both God and man. Such an attempt would already eliminate both the *deus in carne* and the *deus crucifixus.*

It is clear that in Seeberg's interpretation of Luther, the *deus in carne* and the *deus crucifixus* are both the *deus revelatus* and the *deus absconditus.*[47] God becoming man and conquering through suffering define the content of revelation, but they also mean that God is hidden in revelation. The conquering through suffering, of course, implies the resurrection. Thus Seeberg says:

For Luther the death of Christ and the resurrection implied with it is the deepest and liveliest expression for the essence of the hidden God, who here worked his own work. The cross of Christ and the resurrection hold the secret of God's work, which works life through death. Christ was set, the sign of contradiction, as the one who wishes to help the sinners and those who long for grace. The person of Christ, in whom God was incarnate and hidden, so that man could not see him but only hear him, or again could not have him but only see—this person of Christ shows in his word and handling the art of God's life. The concrete God in Christ is the hidden God, who however is no more directly hidden, but is hidden in the concrete and then revealed, insofar as we in bending under the cross believe in him. That is the paradox of Christian religion; Christ as the expression of the working in opposites and through this the concrete revelation of the hidden God.[48]

Such is the consistent nature from which every theological problem is approached by Seeberg and it is essentially correct. But one cannot help wondering if it has not been overdone, and therefore is incorrect in its nuances. My feeling is best expressed by Wilhelm Pauck when he declares:

It is Seeberg's great merit to have irrefutably shown that when Luther speaks of the "hidden" or "abscondite" God he does not refer to the

[47] E. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 129, 213.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

inscrutable and unknowable divine being *in se* [in himself] but to God who in His revelation hides himself in the means of revelation. He discloses himself in ways that are utterly contrary to those which natural reason and natural religion and moral instincts expect. . . . Because (Christ) exhibits the divine reality, He can become the archetype of the way in which God deals with human life; by humiliation He glorifies, by destruction He builds up, by sending sickness He heals, by causing to die He bestows life, etc. Seeberg never tires of pointing to such ideas as the dominant ones in Luther's thinking. Thus he interprets it correctly, but by means of an overemphasis.[49]

The greatness of Seeberg's interpretation, it seems to me, is that he has given content to the identification of revelation and hiddenness in Luther's thought. The intent of Kattenbusch here comes to life. Seeberg's attempt to exclude hiddenness behind revelation was less successful, as noted in the previous sections. Casual statements that God behind revelation must be seen in relation to revelation are suggestive, but they are never elaborated—probably because Seeberg is only interested in the identification of revelation and hiddenness.

A third way of understanding Luther's thought, with somewhat different nuances for the interpretation of hiddenness, is emphasized by the interpreters who insist that the *theologia crucis* is the key to the understanding of Luther. While Werner Elert insists that the cross is essential in Luther's thought, it is Paul Althaus who elaborates and tries to substantiate this claim. Contending that the cross is included in all Christian theology, he affirms that the point of departure is the clue to Luther's difference from many theologians. He definitely starts with the *theologia crucis* as over against the *theologia gloriae* (theology of glory).[50] He finds this already in the *Heidelberg Disputation,* where the concern of theology is not with the capturing of God's

[49] W. Pauck, review of E. Seeberg, *Luthers Theologie,* Vol. II, in *Church History,* Vol. XX, 1940, p. 200.

[50] Paul Althaus, *"Die Bedeutung des Kreuzes im Denken Luthers,"* in *Evangelium und Leben,* p. 51.

unseeable essence, but with the grasping of God's essence as revealed through suffering and the cross. Paul himself was not convinced by what he wrote in Romans 1:20, suggests Althaus, and moved from the *theologia gloriae* to the *theologia crucis*. Luther saw this most clearly and therefore knew that every attempt to move from the created universe, whether through speculation or the moral work of man, ends in self-elevation to God. Luther ruled out speculation on God's majesty and any effort of salvation through man's activity.[51] For him the *theologia gloriae* and the *theologia crucis* were in opposition in man's earthly existence.

The general similarity between Seeberg, Althaus, and Elert in respect to the basis of Luther's theology is unmistakable. The *theologia crucis* is the emphasis upon the cross as the one crucial point in the broader context of revelation described by Seeberg. The nuances of interpretation of the *deus absconditus* are sufficiently marked in the case of Althaus to demand separate attention, though it can be said that he does not find a direct identification of *absconditus* and *revelatus* in Luther. Elert definitely emphasizes the antithesis between the two. This does not mean that he understands hiddenness apart from some concept of revelation. Such a view, he contends, would be an unknown God and foreign to Luther. In Elert's estimation Luther's *deus absconditus* belongs to the knowledge of God which men have through natural theology. Here something at least is known of God, but the content of such knowledge leaves God hidden in His relation to man. Elert expresses it in these words:

> This God who makes us responsible for demands which we cannot fulfill, who introduces questions in our minds which we cannot answer, who created us for the good and still gives us no other choice than to do evil—that is the *deus absconditus*.[52]

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[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

[52] W. Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, Vol. I, p. 19.

Certainly God must have other plans and these are evident in revelation. Therefore for Luther the decisive thing is that out of the *"deus absconditus,* through the crucifixion of Christ, came the *deus revelatus."* [53] Thus the two must be seen in opposition to each other.

Although the general approach to Luther in Erich Seeberg and Elert has many common elements, the understanding of hiddenness is antithetical. Erich Seeberg sees only the identification of hiddenness and revelation in Luther. Elert sees only their differentiation.

C. THE DOUBLE RELATION OF REVELATION AND HIDDENNESS

It is apparent that the center of difference in the interpretation of hiddenness in Luther shifts primarily around its relation to revelation. Generally, the difference thus far is between those who see hiddenness behind God's revelation in Christ, either apart from it or in relation to it, and those who identify it with revelation. But these distinctions cannot be taken in an absolute sense. Ritschl objects to the concept of hiddenness because he finds it unrelated to revelation in Luther. His suggestion is that it must be seen in relation to revelation. But his elaboration of revelation makes the concept unnecessary. The all-working character of God is the hiddenness of God in Hirsch's analysis and the nature of faith consists in holding together the supposed antithetical character of revelation and hiddenness. Hiddenness is considered separate from revelation but related to it in faith. Elert defines hiddenness as the natural knowledge of God apart from Christ, but insists that revelation in Christ makes the concept superfluous. Reinhold Seeberg also calls attention to the concept in Luther in conjunction with natural theology and suggests that *absconditus* is equated with God as will behind his revelation of himself. His analysis, contrary to Elert, implies

[53] *Ibid.,* p. 95.

that God as will and as hidden is to be taken seriously even in relation to his disclosure in Christ. Karl Holl stands alone in the exclusive emphasis that hiddenness applies to God's strange work in leading man to the knowledge of God's reality manifest in revelation. This view also appears in other writers but in a context of meaning which changes its character. Holl's emphasis is finally that revelation makes the strange work clear. He defines hiddenness as a path at the end of which lies revelation.

Only Ferdinand Kattenbusch and Erich Seeberg emphasize the equation of revelation and hiddenness. Kattenbusch's understanding of revelation, both in his historical and systematic works, is so much in the Ritschlian orbit that while he points to the mystery of the "why" of God's revelation, its content and mode make God's nature too apparent and self-evident. Exactly the opposite is true in Erich Seeberg's exposition of Luther. Here revelation and hiddenness are understood in such a way that God's manifestation of love is not self-evident. God is seen and apprehended through a veil; God's Spirit is at work as the precondition of knowing God. He remains hidden in His revelation. The difference is a classic illustration of the dissimilarity between a Ritschlian and a non-Ritschlian understanding of revelation. But whatever the difference, one point of similarity remains. Neither sees any place in Luther's thought for the concept of hiddenness apart from its equation with revelation. Seeberg's rigorous attempt to nullify the meaning of such passages in Luther was noted previously.

There is a type of interpretation of Luther which calls attention both to hiddenness behind revelation and to hiddenness in revelation. From different perspectives, it is exemplified in the writings of Paul Althaus and Karl Heim. For Althaus, hiddenness behind revelation has two aspects. The first is God's hiddenness to the natural man. But this means that God's revelation is hidden, not that God is hidden in general. The second aspect is that it is only the believer who can say that God is hidden.

Here hiddenness is interpreted as the unidentifiable character of God in view of the strange way in which he acts. Thus Althaus writes:

> The theology of the cross means: God let himself be known in that, which according to natural judgment signifies the opposite of Godly. His wisdom appears in foolishness, his splendor in disgrace. For the natural man his revelation is outright hiddenness.[54]

The events which make God completely hidden to the natural man are also the happenings in which God is apprehended by the believer. Althaus says that Luther's understanding means that the believer finds God revealed in circumstances which are unrevealing to the unbeliever. What is light for one is darkness for another. But there could be no darkness without light.

The believer also recognizes God's hiddenness but he recognizes God hidden in suffering. He sees God's revelation behind his judgment, his "yes" hidden in his "no." Faith dares in the "strange work of God" to see God's own true work hidden.[55]

In contrast to Holl's interpretation, this situation remains dialectical. The strange work is not a path to seeing the true work. Rather the true work must always be seen in the strange work. Revelation does not emancipate man from this problem. Here again is the difference between a Ritschlian and non-Ritschlian understanding of Luther.

Althaus has a similar approach in his systematic theological works. There he distinguishes between hiddenness (*Verborgenheit*) and mystery (*Geheimnis*).[56] Hiddenness belongs to the sphere of original revelation (*Uroffenbarung*) which he distin-

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[54] Paul Althaus, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[56] There is an exception to this distinction in Althaus, *Die letzen Dinge*, in which the revelation in Christ is directly equated with hiddenness (p. 35). Even here, however, the emphasis falls upon the hiddenness behind as well as in revelation. Hiddenness in revelation is not elaborated, but affirmed in connection with salvation (p. 34), the new man in Christ (p. 31), and the kingdom of God (p. 34).

guishes from natural theology. It means the manifestation of God in the world apart from Christ wherever it is recognized as such. It is preparatory revelation. It is not an attempt to arrive at a knowledge of God on the basis of an open and evident manifestation apart from revelation in Christ. That is natural theology.

Original revelation and hiddenness belong together. Revelation which does not give the conviction of salvation produces a problem and confirms God's hidden character. He characterizes this situation by saying that original revelation is like "homesickness, which comes from the home, but it does not guarantee the homecoming." [57] What is more decisive—the homecoming—remains hidden. Original revelation as hiddenness defines man's situation as despair.

The answer here is provided in the second interpretation, hiddenness in revelation. It is revelation in Christ, which is not self-evident, but apprehended in faith through God's veiling of himself in revelation. In this act, God steps out of hiddenness into mystery, without erasing His hiddenness except at the point of revelation. The essence of God's being remains hidden—no higher knowledge of another world or of cosmological mysteries is given. God's revelation in Christ remains meaningful mystery, over against hiddenness. In spite of the refusal to use the term hiddenness in conjunction with Christ, the similarity between his historical study of Luther and his own systematic work is evident enough.

This double aspect is no less evident in Karl Heim's analysis. In considering his analysis of Luther's relation to the middle ages, he indicated Luther's experience of the hiddenness of God apart from Christ and the hiddenness of God in Christ. The former was considered fully in the previous section because of its particular relation to the middle ages. The point of emphasis is

[57] Paul Althaus, *Grundriss der Dogmatik*, Vol. I, p. 30.

upon the affirmation of God's hidden nature as experienced apart from Christ, not, as in Althaus, upon hiddenness to the non-believer. Although Althaus points to the hidden essence of God even for the believer in Christ, this aspect is oriented Christologically. Heim's understanding in terms of the nature of hiddenness in the first sense is theocentric rather than Christocentric.

It is the second aspect of hiddenness which is definitely Christological. Here also, he cuts through the Ritschlian understanding. God's truth and love are manifested contrary to sense experience and transcend moral categories. Heim categorically affirms that for Luther Christ is transcendent, but present to man in faith.[58] Transcendence makes him hidden over and above the general perception of love and moral law in the world. Christ known in faith stands beyond man as something quite distinct from simply the revelation of God as love. In short, the hiddenness of God is a cardinal point precisely because God in his revelation is also hidden from man's sight, though he makes himself known to man in the midst of experience. The mystery of God's revelation is in accord with the notion of the hidden working of God, both in and behind his revelation.

In his theological writings Heim also has an emphasis upon hiddenness apart from revelation and hiddenness in revelation. The primary accent, however, is upon the former. This aspect is fully elaborated in *God Transcendent*.[59] It will be remembered that the main aim in this book is to give a perspective which adequately differentiates God from the world of man and at the same time shows the genuine disclosure of God within life with-

[58] K. Heim, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

[59] The word "transcendent" is particularly misleading in the title of Heim's work. It is a translation of *Glauben und Denken*, which is Vol. I of *Der Evangelische Glaube und das Denken der Gegenwart*. The title, *God Transcendent*, was chosen to give a title which might suggest the contents of the book to the English-speaking world—a device which is often employed. The subtitle in English, Foundation for a Christian Metaphysic, is a much better description. The term "transcendent" or "transcendence" is itself not often used by Heim.

out shattering its structure. Improper theories of transcendence employ categories which base affirmations about God directly within the structures of man's world. The temptation of casting thought about God within the categories of space he finds evident in the emphasis upon one factor in a series (idolatry) or in emphasizing the whole (pantheism).[60] This is not escaped in mystical thought, where a reality is posited behind the opposites of the world.[61] It involves thinking in polarity, for the opposite of that which is, or the reality beyond the opposite, is still conceived in reference to some category of experience in this world, even though it is considered opposite or beyond that from which reference is made.[62] In this respect, Heim suggests that the *via negativa* does not indicate a proper transcendence.

Heim feels that on the basis of metaphysics one must recognize the unknowability of God. The transcendence of God is the hiddenness of God in respect to knowability.[63] He is so hidden that one cannot compare him to the planets or to the depths of the ocean, both of which are potentially knowable. Rather, in dealing with God there is absolute hiddenness.[64] Man lives in a world which has structures of experience from which he cannot emancipate himself, and therefore God remains invisible.[65] Inasmuch as this is the case, declares Heim, one must agree with Luther that all things and happenings are but God's mask.[66]

Heim contends that it is out of such an unknown God that the real God speaks. He suggests that Paul knew this in his reference to the unknown God in Athens. Paul did not find a parallel for his missionary work among any of the Athenian gods, with their definite natures and functions based upon analogy to the

[60] Heim, *God Transcendent*, pp. 194, 211.
[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5.
[62] Heim, *Jesus der Herr*, Vol. II, pp. 21, 37, 47, 49.
[63] In *Jesus der Herr* there is a section significantly entitled, *Der unbekannte Gott*, and a subsection called *Die Unerkennbarkeit Gottes.*
[64] Heim, *Jesus der Herr*, p. 40.
[65] Heim, *God Transcendent*, p. 214.
[66] Heim, *Jesus der Herr*, p. 51.

needs and projections of men. But Paul did find a parallel in the unknown God. He is a God, but one who is not known for any particular character. Paul declared that this unknown God is the God of Jesus Christ, the God known to him in revelation.

Whether or not this analysis is the meaning of the Pauline passage, it does give a clue to the thought of Heim. The unknown God is the "wholly other." [67] On the other hand, to ask about the creator God is to pass beyond the realm of all knowledge.[68] To know that he is Creator and Lord, means that he has already broken in upon man.[69] The fullness of this entrance is, of course, Jesus Christ. Man cannot know God who is hidden. But in his revelation, in his breaking into life and grasping man, he steps out of his hiddenness.[70]

Heim feels, so to speak, that in this event the whole structure of the world is lifted up, for it is a voice which is not dependent upon the nature of the world in which man lives. In this sense, the gospel appears as foolishness. It is the ungraspable character of God's act in the conjunction of Spirit and Word.[71] But this ungraspableness, for Heim, is not the same as hiddenness.

The central affirmation of Heim then is that God remains unknown, and in this sense hidden, unless he breaks through to man in revelation. More specifically, God's essence remains ungraspable, and his revelation in its claim upon man also remains beyond grasping. The latter, however, is the basis for all knowledge of God and in its more positive sense it is still encased in a form of hiddenness.

The correlation between systematic work and research on Luther, which was noted as characteristic of German writers, is certainly apparent in Althaus and Heim, from whose pens we are fortunate to have both types of writing. More important for

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[67] Heim, *God Transcendent,* p. 187.
[68] *Ibid.,* p. 195.
[69] *Ibid.,* pp. 206-7.
[70] Heim, *Jesus der Herr,* p. 169.
[71] *Ibid.,* p. 186.

the present problem, however, is their correlation of hiddenness and revelation in the double sense of apart from Christ and in Christ. In neither man is the emphasis upon hiddenness in revelation in Christ as significant in their understanding of Luther as it is for Erich Seeberg. But in both there is considerable emphasis upon hiddenness in relation to revelation, without claiming, as does Erich Seeberg, that the only genuine emphasis in Luther is the equation of the two. It can be said that in the thought of these three men there is a distinct advance over the Ritschlian approach in the understanding of hiddenness. Whatever the differences, it is clear that the new understanding involves a close connection between revelation and hiddenness.

D. PREDESTINATION AND THE WRATH OF GOD

The complex problem of predestination is correlative to the understanding of hiddenness and revelation. This is borne out by the fact that none of the interpreters of Luther finds his view of predestination to be a deterministic one, that is, one formed by reference to a decree behind or in opposition to revelation. Each interpreter, except one,[72] says something positive about Luther's idea of God's relation to man.

Emanuel Hirsch, with the motif of the all-working character of God, naturally places the problem of predestination into the same context. He finds it is a central concept for Luther which affirms that God is the basis of salvation and that it safeguards him from mockery. Except in Luther's occasional concessions to the weak, it implies the possibility of rejection, that through his secret will God meant one for damnation. But God is still to be trusted, and trust means precisely to bank upon God even though damnation is a real possibility. It is Karl Heim who puts together double predestination and predestination. While double predestination is grounded in God's inscrutable will and predestination in his revealed will, Heim points to both as part

[72] Elert believes that faith makes the question of predestination superfluous.

of Luther's experience. They are not contradictory but held together as a unity.

> In *fides* lies the synthesis of both contradictory applications; on the one side the transcendence of the will to salvation and the subjective experience of the incalculable double will; on the other side, the transcendence of the absolute double will and the subjective experience of the unconditioned will toward salvation.[73]

The connection of the problem of predestination with faith, whether in the context of protecting the prerogative of God (Hirsch) or in an inscrutable will behind the revealed will (Heim), does not make predestination into an intolerable concept. This is true also in the interpretation of Althaus, who insists that rejection must be taken with utmost seriousness as a part of the hidden character of God's predestination. This possibility, he declares, is what makes faith faith over against sight. Althaus is aware, of course, that this is a meaningful statement only if one has already been grasped by the *theologia crucis*.

Many interpreters of Luther simply emphasize predestination, since there is evidence that Luther became dissatisfied, if he did not altogether abandon, the idea of double predestination. Reinhold Seeberg writes that for Luther predestination was strictly a problem of faith. Acknowledging that at times it appears as if predestination involved God's working contrary to faith, Seeberg affirms that the real point for Luther was always that faith and predestination belonged together. He who really had faith—not to be confused with whoever has heard of Christ and has been baptized—was predestined.[74] Even in his periods of despair, when Luther was not in the condition of faith, Luther never speculated upon predestination, maintaining that one will only break one's neck in such activities.[75]

If one may paraphrase Seeberg's interpretation of Luther, it is

[73] Heim, *Das Gewissheitsproblem in der systematischen Theologie bis zu Schleiermacher*, p. 256.
[74] R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, p. 154.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

as if faith takes the problem out of predestination, since it satisfies man's relation to God. When one is not in the state of faith, it is of no help and therefore speculation is of no avail. The real problem is therefore the mystery of faith. But Seeberg does not address himself directly to this problem in Luther, except to hint that the possibility of faith itself belongs to the sovereign God whose working is hidden. This is generally in accord with Seeberg's emphasis upon God's hidden will as the free background for his manifestation. Through revelation, this incomprehensible background receives sufficient expression for man to trust it.

On the problem of predestination, unlike many other points, the two Seebergs are in agreement. In typical fashion, Erich Seeberg mentions the problem of *The Bondage of the Will*, where the hidden God seems to stand behind the revealed God, and then moves on to insist that the genuine point is revelation. Hence predestination is connected directly with faith. Predestination is no longer a complicating factor or a problem—it is an aspect of faith. This is even true in the case of the *resignatio ad infernum*, which he interprets in the first volume on Luther as a symbol indicating that man is never apart from God. He who is willing to be damned accepts God, and hell is no longer hell.[76] In the second volume, a psychological interpretation is given to the concept in Luther. Those who flee damnation will surely be among the damned. Those who accept it might well escape.[77] Thus the resignation *ad infernum* is interpreted from the standpoint of faith, and not from that of God's decree.

Seeberg is certain that Luther did not accept the idea of a decree. That is why Luther speaks of the certainty of salvation and the comfort of predestination rather than the certainty of the latter. The certainty of salvation is the testimony of the Spirit and indicates that it does not rest upon one's activity. The com-

[76] E. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 148.
[77] E. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 130

fort of predestination, on the other hand, is that it gives an indication, a sort of seal or promise, that man's salvation does not rest in his hands, but upon God's righteous will. It is a comfort for this to be taken out of man's hands.

One point is clear in the discussion of the motivation of the idea of predestination—it is not considered a terrible thing to be avoided as in Ritschl, or to be ignored as far as possible, as in Holl and Kattenbusch. In general also, there is a correlation between views of hiddenness behind revelation, as well as in revelation, and views which include double predestination and predestination. There is also a correlation between views of hiddenness in relation to revelation, but not behind revelation, and views which include only predestination.

There is no such clear pattern in the interpretation of Luther's concept of the wrath of God. It was noted earlier that Karl Heim suggests that God's real nature is to be seen even in wrath and that this is different from Holl's understanding in which wrath is merely the path to the discovery of God's love. Emanuel Hirsch makes a similar suggestion to Heim's in the declaration that the believer must see God's grace in and through his wrath. Therefore wrath, he concludes, belongs to the revealed will of God, not to his nature behind revelation. In Reinhold Seeberg's understanding of Luther the concept is superfluous to the Christian, and an impossible description about God's nature. Wrath is applicable only to the continuation of evil in man through whom God also works.

Elert, for whom the problem of predestination is superfluous, gives the most careful attention to the problem of wrath. He believes that one of the ways in which Luther's doctrine of revelation is safeguarded is in God's wrath as hiddenness. But for him the wrath of God in Luther is not to be identified with capricious activity on the part of God. God is eternal and unchangeable. To say that God could either release man from disobedience or

send him to damnation, is to make him capricious.[78] He is not, even though he appears so to man.

For Luther, says Elert, wrath, as the determined character of God in relation to man, stems from sin or unbelief. As Creator, Judge, and Lord of all, God could, had to, and would punish disobedience. That this should be felt as horror and wrath is natural. Nevertheless, Luther also sees that it is exactly wrath as hiddenness rather than necessary punishment which combines its objective and subjective character. Man's understanding of God as lawgiver does not seriously imply hiddenness. Rather it is his sovereignty over man's destiny, expressed in majesty and elevation above and against man which makes man feel his Lordship. Here his activity seems hidden, and as an offense to reason's attempt to draw an analogy with the life of man. Elert finds that the fundamental fact for Luther is that God and man are not felt to be friends in this world. Therefore there can be no appeal to the *jus humanum* (human right) as the norm for God's activity.[79]

In this interpretation, God is consistent in nature yet hidden in his relation to man. Why this is so one does not know, but the fact itself is significant. For Elert it means that the wrath of God generally, and in Luther, cannot be reduced to subjective experience, as in nineteenth century thought.[80] He maintains that the supposed subjectivity in Luther's thought—that God is what he is believed to be—is not sheer subjectivity in that, apart from faith, God is known as wrath wherever disobedience against him is taken seriously. The significant fact in Luther is that rebellion against God finds its opposition, or wrath, in God. It does appear to the present writer that Elert has quite rightly hinted that here Luther's subjectivity is simply the experience of the believer and has nothing to do with positing or denying God's wrath.

[78] W. Elert, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Elert sees that in Luther the wrath of God makes explicit that grace is from him and not through man's activity. Here wrath may also be the preparation for the gospel,[81] but its reality is not thereby denied for the unbeliever or for the believer who falls into doubt. The reality of wrath is affirmed both as the objective state of God in relation to unbelief and as man's experience apart from faith. The basis of this wrath has its most hidden character in God's majesty as it controls man's destiny.

The inescapable conclusion from Elert's analysis is that, while he has denied predestination as a meaningful category, most of the elements of that problem are covered in his analysis of wrath. Generally, however, one must conclude that the interpretation of Luther on the problem of wrath has not been dealt with as extensively and carefully as in the case of other issues covered thus far. Elert's discussion does not connect the problem with revelation, while the interpretations which do are not developed.

In the last chapter attention will be given to the interpretation of Luther. Here it is important to note that the variety of interpretation on the relation of revelation and hiddenness in historical and theological works is nevertheless a distinct gain which had theological consequences. The wave of research has the cumulative effect of showing that the Ritschlian approach to Luther is not correct, either in its relation to the medieval world or in its understanding of revelation. It is increasingly clear that the Ritschlian interpreters, in spite of variation on the structure of hiddenness, read Luther through the eyes of their own presuppositions. This included a distinct distrust for Luther's use of any categories of the medieval world and a distortion of Luther's understanding of revelation by taking the proposition that God is love without concern for the mode or structure from which this affirmation is made.

The interpreters who have an appreciative word to say about Luther's relation to the middle ages, with the possible exception

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

of Karl Heim, do not insist upon the priority of the *theologia crucis* (Hirsch, Reinhold Seeberg). The reverse is also true. Those who emphasize the cross as the point of departure do not concern themselves with the medieval problem (Althaus, Elert) or are inclined to de-emphasize it (E. Seeberg). Thus a clear picture of Luther's understanding of the relation of revelation to the medieval world has not yet emerged. This is why there is still considerable ambiguity in the place of hiddenness in its relation to revelation. This ambiguity is obvious in the summary of the previous section on the double relation of hiddenness and revelation.

Whatever the relation of hiddenness and revelation, it is also clear that in the interpretation of Luther and in certain correlative systematic works, hiddenness emerges as a meaningful category of considerable importance for theological thinking. The contention is at least established that hiddenness and revelation belong together for a meaningful concept of revelation. With the exception of Reinhold Seeberg, it has meant a conception of revelation which is infinitely deeper in meaning than the Ritschlian form, and even in Reinhold Seeberg it has led to a more adequate doctrine of God. Before more definite conclusions can be drawn, it is necessary to explore new vistas of the problem in a notable attempt to pick up the threads of the problem in circumstances both prior rather than subsequent to Ritschlian thought, and in neo-Reformation theology.

Chapter III

GOD REVEALED AS THE WHOLLY OTHER

A. A NEW SOURCE OF INTERPRETATION

The writings of Rudolf Otto provide a different approach to religion and Christian theology than that represented either by the Ritschlian movement or the wave of Luther interpretation. Since his writings stress the uniqueness of Christianity in respect to truth less than Christian theologians generally, his works have not received sufficient positive attention by theologians—either through neglect or rejection. Nevertheless, *The Idea of the Holy* has become a religious classic which no one can afford to ignore. Further, the suggestive affirmations about the nature and structure of religions, documented as they are by a wealth of materials, are of tremendous aid in understanding Christian theology as such as well as its relation to other religions.

Otto consistently calls attention to the religious dimension as a phenomenon which is to be understood, appreciated, and experienced in its own right. This naturally calls for elaboration and substantiation from many angles, and this is precisely what Otto has done. Ranging through the history of theology and philosophy, he makes a case for the character of religion as *a priori* in manifestation, and distinct from determination by philosophical categories and structures. In line with his premise that

the religious dimension is *sui generis*—that is, a manifestation underived from anything else—he finds echoes of such approaches in certain predecessors, namely Kant, Schleiermacher, and Fries. He definitely wishes to move behind Ritschl to a new beginning. In Kant he singles out passages which deal with the religious *a priori* both in the first and third critiques. In this respect, the second critique with its emphasis upon the ethical is ignored.[1] Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion* receives particular attention as a singularly significant book in that it broke through the intellectualism and moralism of the Enlightenment and carved a new area for religion, namely experience—or more precisely still, feeling, in the sense of a directly different order of cognition than had previously been possible in either philosophy or theology. The more overtly Christian book, *The Christian Faith,* is considered inferior by comparison. It is the philosopher Fries, however, more than Kant or Schleiermacher, who developed the *sui generis* character of religion and emphasized its objective character within the context of human experience.

Whether or not Otto is correct in his understanding of Kant, Schleiermacher, and Fries is a problem which lies outside the present concern. He points to definite mistakes[2] which they

[1] It is this general picture which makes it difficult for me to follow part of the interpretation of Rudolf Otto in the book by Robert F. Davidson, *Rudolf Otto's Interpretation of Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1947), in which the author frequently insists that Otto drew heavily from Ritschl, but without giving specific references. He suggests that Otto himself was not willing to admit this relation. See pages 34, 42, 57, 92 of Davidson's book. It is possible to trace some connection in the interpretation of the historical Jesus, but even here the nuances are different. In his theory of ethics, Otto did lean heavily on Kant's second critique. But on the nature of religion, Otto is diametrically opposed to Ritschl who in this respect almost slavishly follows the second critique.

[2] For the relevant sections on Otto's understanding of Kant, see *The Philosophy of Religion,* pp. 19, 39, 65, 93, 152; *Religious Essays,* pp. 27, 69; *The Idea of the Holy,* pp. 117-8, 152. On Schleiermacher, see *The Philosophy of Religion,* pp. 15, 23; *Religious Essays,* pp. 68f., 75; *The Idea of the Holy,* pp. 9-11, 21-22, 112, 159; *Mysticism, East and West,* pp. 233f. On Fries, see *The Philosophy of Religion,* pp. 23, 43, 66-67, 92, 100-1, 123-26, 130-32.

made and generally insists that they did not go far enough. But central in any case is the insistence that religion is a manifestation in its own right, thereby requiring its own tools of understanding and judgment. This means that the religious dimension is, quite independently, a realm of disclosure which is not to be tampered with by approaches that do not take this initial premise seriously.

If Otto's philosophy of religion is directed to the claim of the religious as a realm in its own nature, his studies in the history of religion and theology—which form the bulk of his writing—are geared to giving substance to the nature of the religious, particularly the qualitative character of disclosure. His emphasis upon the wholly other is itself grounded in an affirmative appraisal of the structural similarity of revelation in all religious manifestations. Here revelation, understood in its most comprehensive sense, also establishes God's hiddenness in conjunction with revelation. Hiddenness is found to be expressed in the nonconceptual side of the manifestation of the numinous—which is the particular character of the wholly other—and in the terrible, mysterious character of the nonrational as it confronts man.

With these preliminary observations, it is necessary to turn to Otto's understanding of Luther, which he himself insists is the groundwork of his labors, and then to further analysis of hiddenness in relation to manifestation of the wholly other.

B. THE AWESOME AND THE FASCINATING

Otto attributes the germs of his own thought to Luther. In the *Idea of the Holy,* he confesses that the understanding of the numinous stems from his own early work in Luther, and that this antedates the same discovery in the Old Testament and in the history of religion.[3] In fact, his earliest book was *Die Anschauung vom heiligen Geiste bei Luther.* Although in this volume Otto confesses his indebtedness to Ritschl and the

[3] Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* p. 103.

Ritschlian historians in their work on Luther, his understanding of Luther's view of the work of the Holy Spirit is an interpretation of a Luther different from the one whom Ritschl had come to appreciate. In this book, Otto indicates that Luther excluded any kind of speculation about the majesty of God, of God in his own nature.[4] But according to Otto, this affirms rather than refutes the place of the invisible God and the direction of faith toward that which is not seen. For Ritschl, the absence of speculation on the majesty of God in the thought of Luther meant that faith was directed primarily to the manifestation of God to man apart from hiddenness or mystery. But this is not Otto's interpretation even in this early book on Luther. Faith for Luther, declares Otto, is directed to that which is not seen, to that which in some sense is made known only in the witness of the Holy Spirit. Both the nature of faith and the witness of the Spirit as the ground of faith are hidden from man's eyes.

Already in this book, Otto speaks of the *adhesio dei*, which includes the invisible God. But the invisible God in Luther is not an otherworldly God. The invisible God is at the same time the father of our Lord Jesus Christ.[5] Although Otto does not deal with the nature of Christ in relation to the invisible God in this early book, this aspect of Christ, what Otto calls his numinous character, is stressed in his later books, especially the *Idea of the Holy*, and *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man.* The important point is that the invisible God for Luther, according to Otto and in contradistinction to Ritschl, has a very positive meaning. The impact of God who cannot be seen in essence or understood in his acts is still God with whom man deals.

This is particularly evident in the continuous reference Otto makes to the all-working character of God in Luther's thought. God works all things, though they appear strange to man.[6] From

[4] Otto, *Die Anschauung vom heiligen Geiste bei Luther*, pp. 19-20.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5, 18, 19.

a more descriptive side, God works all things, those that appear strange and those that are ordinary. It is not the problem of the natural and the supernatural, but of God working ordinarily and extraordinarily within, and beyond, the frame of the natural order of things as one perceives them.

As one turns from this earlier work of Otto to sections in which he deals with Luther in the *Idea of the Holy* and in the *Religious Essays,* the difference from Ritschl's interpretation is even more evident. Otto is unwilling to divide the thought of Luther in his doctrine of God between that which is distinctly Luther's and that which is borrowed from his predecessors, either Duns Scotus or the mystics. Otto thinks that the emphasis of Scotus upon the voluntaristic side of God, over against God as being, introduces the idea of a living God and that these elements of the nonrational are indicated by Luther in some of his most characteristic expressions. The investigation, however, of how much Luther took from Scotus, Otto does not consider important, since there is a similar feeling, though expressed differently.[7] Evidently writing against the Ritschlians, he declares:

> This aspect of Luther's religion was later tacitly expunged, and is today readily dismissed as "not the authentic Luther," or as "a residuum of the scholastic speculations of the nominalists." But, if that is so, it is strange that this "residuum of scholaticism" exercised such a power in Luther's own mental life as it palpably did. In point of fact this is not a "residuum" at all, but beyond all question the mysterious background of his religious life, obscure and "uncanny," and to estimate it in all its power and profundity we need to abstract the lucid bliss and joyfulness of Luther's faith in the divine grace, and to see this faith in relation to the background of that mysterious experience on which it rests. It matters not from what source, whether "nominalism" or the traditional teaching of his Order, his consciousness was first stirred; we have in any case in Luther the numinous consciousness at first hand, stirred and agitated through its typical "moments," as we have come to know them.[8]

[7] Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* p. 100.
[8] *Ibid.,* p. 100.

What stronger words could there be! In the *Religious Essays,* Otto concretely suggests that Luther utilized scholastic terminology, but transformed the meaning for his own purpose.[9] This interpretation is in line with the discussion of the previous chapter, where Luther's thought on this particular issue is seen in its totality.

Otto elaborates the distinction which Luther made in *The Bondage of the Will* between God in himself, as he is in his nature, and God as he is revealed in his mercy.[10] While the interpretation in the previous chapter centers around the place of hiddenness in conjunction with the unrevealed or the revealed, Otto emphasizes the impression which God in himself makes upon one. It is as if the unrevealed were revealing itself, and not merely as the God of mercy or love. While some interpreters place hiddenness in the majesty of God in his dealing with man, Otto is concerned to indicate the experience which man has before the majesty of God as it confronts him. In a sense, hiddenness is the terribleness of God as one stands before his majesty, and as that majesty is made known to one. In fact, Otto suggests that man cannot really see this majesty, including the fear which it inspires, unless it already touches him. It is this which Otto thinks Luther meant when he said that the natural man cannot sufficiently fear God, though the fear of God played such a large part for Luther.[11]

The decisive point in Otto's estimation of Luther's doctrine of the majesty of God does not lie in conceptions one might apply to majesty, such as righteousness or goodness. It is the fact of majesty itself before which one fears and shudders. It is the nonrational, and although Otto does not use the term, one could say it is Luther's *deus nudus* to which Otto is referring. It

[9] Otto, *Religious Essays,* p. 17.
[10] Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* pp. 24, 101.
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 15.

is confronting God as he is, without predicates. Otto graphically suggests this when he writes of Luther:

That before which his soul quails again and again in awe is not merely the stern Judge, demanding righteousness—for He is wholly a "God of revelation"—but rather at the same time God in His "unrevealedness," in the aweful majesty of His very Godhead; He before whom trembles not simply the transgressor of the law, but the creature, as such, in his "uncovered" creaturehood. Luther even ventures to designate this awe-inspiring, nonrational character of deity as *deus ipse, ut est in sua natura et maiestate* [God in himself as he is in his essence].[12]

Otto suggests that Luther expressed this majesty in feelings which often bordered on the demonic, and that even in preaching he poured forth the nature of this majestic God. His sermon on Exodus 20 is well known, and Otto quotes from it. Speaking of God, Luther declared:

Yea, he is more terrible and frightful than the devil. For he dealeth with us and bringeth us to ruin with power, smiteth and hammereth us and payeth no heed to us. In his majesty he is a consuming fire. For therefrom can no man refrain: if he thinketh on God aright, his heart in his body is struck with terror . . . Yea, as soon as he heareth God named, he is filled with trepidation and fear.[13]

Or again,

Yea, for the world it seemeth as though God were a mere silly yawner, the mouth ever agape, or a cuckold, who lets another lie with his wife and feigneth that he sees it not. He assaileth a man, and *hath such a delight* therein that he is of his jealousy and wrath impelled to *consume* the wicked.[14]

It is these passages, and others of similar nature, which prompt Otto to say the *numen* as majesty first became clear to him in his study of Luther, long before he found similar expressions in the history of religions. But before considering the similar appre-

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

hensions which Otto finds in other religions and from various theological sources, it is essential to see exactly what Otto finds in this feeling of Luther as contrasted with the interpretations examined thus far. For all the divergent interpretations of Luther, no one has declared that God's activity as one finds it, e.g., in the passages quoted above, basically signifies an irrationality or terribleness in God. They have all declared that there is a standard to Luther's God, though some declared it to be opposite man's standards. Otto states that Luther used the latter approach in speaking to the masses, always telling them that God's ways are too high and that he does not act as man does. But this is not, insists Otto, what Luther meant in his profoundest moments. He wanted to show the terrible mysteriousness of God and his activity. For Luther,

> God is altogether "beyond tracking out in his mysteries and his judgements," displays—as in Job—his "*vera maiestas* in his fearful marvels and incomprehensible judgements," is in his essence hidden away from all reason, knows no measure, law, or aim, and is verified in the paradox: "In order, therefore, that there may be a place for faith, all the things that are believed must be hidden away." [15]

As further support for this contention, Otto quotes from Luther:

> For were his [God's] justice such as could be adjudged as just by the human understanding it were manifestly not divine, and would differ in nothing from human justice. But since God is true and single, yea in his entirety incomprehensible and inaccessible to human reason, it is right, nay it follows necessarily, that his justice also is incomprehensible.[16]

Otto insists that in Luther's thought there is not merely a standard beyond man's comprehension. There is a mysteriousness, awful and terrible, but with attraction. It is the nonrational which borders on irrationality, and which prompted Luther to speak of the "whore reason" when he thought of the nonrational side of God.[17] The problem is not how one can

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

come to God through reason, but that reason by its nature cannot grasp the overpowering effect of this impact of God upon man.

Theologians, writes Otto, have tried to express this feeling by declaring that God is outside the law, and that therefore the good is good because God wills it, instead of that God wills it because it is good. Otto suggests that Luther also fell into this trap. It is interesting that Ritschl and Otto here join hands in their distaste for this concept. Most of the Luther interpreters examined in the previous chapter interpreted *exlex* as a higher law. Otto, like Ritschl, declares that the concept *exlex* expresses a fortuitous will and therefore makes God a capricious despot.[18] Therefore he also rejects it. But unlike Ritschl, he insists upon the nonrational, mysterious side of the divine, which the concept *exlex* does not adequately express. This concept, including others, such as predestination and wrath, are

> . . . really perplexed expressions of the nonrational, numinous side of the divine nature . . . they are caricatures prompted by a deficient psychology and a mistaken choice of expressions, and not by any disregard of the absoluteness of moral values.[19]

Although Otto denies the interpretation that *exlex* implies a standard and rejects the term because of its meaning of caprice, he does not reject it as a denial of moral values. This distinction is crucial for Otto, since the nonrational behind the term *exlex* is not devoid of a moral character. The *tremendum,* both as awfulness and fascination, carries an authenticating character within itself. Its nature is neither that of the moral law as in Ritschl's modification of Kant, nor that of a higher law ascribed to God. It is rather the self-authenticating character of the numinous in experience.

Otto readily admits this places a tremendous emphasis upon the nonrational, but in a positive way. He also insists that in

[18] *Ibid.,* p. 105.
[19] *Ibid.,* p. 105.

Luther, and in all theology, this nonrational is combined with the rational or conceptual. The *tremendum* is combined with the more familiar. The unapproachable becomes approachable, and the holy One is connected with goodness.[20] But the reverse also occurs, for the nonrational suggests an energetic and boisterous side to the God of goodness.[21] Luther's energetic, often blissful experience of faith, suggests Otto, is similar to the experience of the mystics, and points to the nonrational, attracting element as part of the manifestation of the divine. In Luther it had its own particular character in his Christ mysticism.

For Otto, Luther is a great symbol of that rare combination of the nonrational with the rational and of majesty with grace, through which the mysterious God takes on positive character for men without simply sinking into mystery or succumbing to conceptual characterization. In Luther, the hidden God remains hidden, though his manifestation is always such that the center and source of life is grounded in him.

Although Otto discovers the nature of the experience of the Holy in Luther, he is less satisfied in the implications of Luther for the problem of the religious *a priori.* In the previous section, Kant, Schleiermacher, and Fries were considered in the context of establishing a separate niche, so to speak, for the religious dimension. When Otto thinks of the religious *a priori,* or the Holy as a separate and distinct category, he is happy to note that faith for Luther was an "independent faculty of knowledge, a mystical *a priori* element in the spirit of man, by which he receives and recognizes suprasensible truth." [22] He finds, however, that this recognition is always identified with the "Holy Spirit in the heart" and with Luther's Christ mysticism. It generally excluded the religious *a priori* in its own right. Where Luther did admit the *a priori* on the basis of natural reason, he

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

did not include the numinous experience of God in himself.

Otto believes that for Luther the numinous was so closely connected with the manifestation of God within the framework of the Christian tradition that the problem of a distinct area of religious manifestation did not enter into his thinking. What Luther said about the experience of the Christian God, Otto utilizes in a wider horizon. What Luther said at times apart from his experience of Christ does not always have the vigorous accent upon the numinous which Otto feels must characterize this realm. But it is the form of Luther's Christian experience which Otto finds valid in all religions.

C. THE NATURE OF THE WHOLLY OTHER

Rudolf Otto's thought can be characterized as variations upon the theme of the wholly other, or the idea of the Holy. Most of his writings center in the discovery of this feeling in philosophy and theology, in the Orient and in the Occident. It is as if some of his books were written as an attempt to shed light upon the same problem from different angles. This was probably not a conscious venture, but grew out of the profound conviction that there is a common element of feeling about the Holy which pervades the life and history of man. It is then not unnatural for Otto to quote Sankara and Eckhart, Augustine and Luther, Plato and Chrysostom, primitive religious rites and English literature. In his estimation all of them bear witness to the place and significance of the Holy, the *mysterium tremendum,* or the wholly other, depending upon which definition one uses.

This generalization cannot be made without taking into account the earlier works of Otto, i.e. *Naturalism and Religion,* and *The Philosophy of Religion.* In the foreword of the *Idea of the Holy,* Otto indicates that he spent considerable time in the examination of the rational or conceptual side of that reality known as God—indicated in the books mentioned above—before he turned to the nonrational. In this context he categorically

states that "no one ought to concern himself with the *'Numen ineffabile'* who has not already devoted assiduous and serious study to the *'Ratio aeterna.'*"[23] Nevertheless, it was noted that in *The Philosophy of Religion,* where he expounds the thought of Fries, the element of the mysterious is very strong. In the attempt to define teleology, the discussion reaches its climax with the flavor of the mysterious.

But the mysterious is no less present in *Naturalism and Religion.* The aim of this book is to refute the type of naturalism which excludes religion and has a mechanical view of the structure and operation of the world, and at the same time, to exclude the type of supernaturalism which is set against such views and which therefore is also rationalistic. In contradistinction to such views, Otto shows that religion manifests itself in and through the phenomena of the natural. A miracle, for example, is a question of the ordinary and the extraordinary, not of the natural and the supernatural interpreted in mechanical and rational terms. The manifestation of religious dimension is not conceived as a separate domain, except as it is a distinctive manifestation in the process of nature, life, and history.

Further, in this book the processes of nature are mysteries, though one may try to comprehend them as far as possible. The fact of existence is a mystery.[24] But thereby neither nature nor existence loses its positive meaning. The character of religion is the combination of the natural and the mysterious.

> Religion itself consists in this: believing and experiencing that in time the Eternal, in the finite the Infinite, in the world God is working, revealing himself, and that in him lies the reason and cause of all being. For this it has names like creation, providence, self-revelation of God in the world, and it lives by the mysteries which are indicated under these names. The mysteries themselves it recognizes in vague

[23] Foreword to the *Idea of the Holy.*

[24] Otto, *Naturalism and Religion,* tr. by J. Arthur Thomson and Margaret R. Thomson (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), p. 43.

or naive forms of conception long before it attempts any definite formulation.[25]

It is clear that the elements which come to the fore in Otto's latest writings also made a strong bid in his earlier writings. It is likewise true that the rational elements never completely disappear in his late works. But in them he is contending for the place of the nonrational. Otto considers the enterprise of theology to be the explication of the rational, though not exclusively so. When it is exclusively so, it is poor theology. But where there is no rational element, it is equally bad, for that leads to the excesses of mysticism and to emptiness of meaning if not of power.

It must be kept in mind that by the rational Otto means the conceptual.[26] There is no notion here of what in contemporary theological jargon is often meant by reason, that is the sense of reasoning. Nor is it the problem of reason and revelation with which Otto is concerned. For if the problem is posed in terms of reason and revelation, Otto is concerned with revelation rather than reason. His thinking gives an analysis of the manifestation of the numinous, or Holy, in the midst of life. In so far as the emphasis is upon the given, his analysis is nearer the concept revelation than reason.[27]

The problem of the rational and the nonrational is that of the proper analysis of that reality which makes its impact upon man's experience as the essence of the religious. If the word "revelation" is used in its broadest terms, both the rational and nonrational are component elements.

It is true that in his later writings Otto emphasizes the nonrational rather than the rational. In itself this is not a defect, since Otto explicitly sets out to analyze this aspect, contending that the rational is not to be neglected. His reasons for analyzing

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 370.
[26] Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, p. 2.
[27] The question of the adequacy of revelation understood in this way will be discussed in the last chapter.

the nonrational are most instructive. Otto feels that this aspect of the religious is neglected in the history of theology and the history of religions, as well as in philosophers since the Enlightenment. But there is another reason which is perhaps more fundamental. Otto believes that the experience of the nonrational is more fundamental in its meaning, and that it manifests itself before rational analysis and reflection can and must take place.

This reason must be developed more fully after the nature of the nonrational has been explored. For the moment it is important to note that there is no contradiction between his early and late writings, but only a more direct emphasis upon the nonrational in his later works. Otto felt that this was not at the expense of the rational side, for he was elaborating that fundamental part of reality which was usually neglected in the analysis of theology and religion.

In the beginning of this section, it was noted that Otto illumines the nonrational by drawing from many sources in the history of theology, religion, and philosophy. The question of which source has priority cannot be answered. One can only give a general suggestion on the basis of some scattered statements and of Otto's own life. It is known that he studied Luther, and that he testified to the discovery of the *mysterium tremendum* in Luther long before he found it in the Old Testament and the history of religions. It is also known that to his earlier reflections belong his studies of Kant, Schleiermacher, and Fries, and the place which these men occupy in confirming a separate domain for the religious. It is further known that a trip to the East confirmed what he had previously discovered and that it brought to his study new areas of information. He was also well versed in the history of Christian theology. But more than this one cannot say. One cannot give priority to one factor over the others.

This is particularly impossible since his later writtings contain all these elements. Where he writes about particular areas of

illumination, as in *Mysticism, East and West,* all the other materials are incorporated. One can perhaps compare the mature work of Otto to a single picture which is illuminated from many angles. In the illumination of that picture, no one source of light is more important than another. Together they bring out a picture of intense character and overwhelming conviction.

Before considering the sources of illumination, it is necessary to ask what the relation is between the various terms which Otto uses to describe the nonrational. The terms are as intermingled as the sources, and also convey a definite picture. At the very outset then, one must ask what these terms are and what the nonrational aspect is supposed to convey even though it cannot be given in conceptual terms.

The terminological problem is particularly acute in the *Idea of the Holy,* where Otto analyzes the character of the nonrational. All the terms he uses are but an attempt to clarify the nature of the nonrational factor. This is true of holy, *numen, mysterium tremendum,* fascination, wholly other.

Otto feels that he cannot start his analysis with "holy," because it usually has as its primary overtone the meaning of "completely good." [28] Although Otto does not deny goodness in the "holy," he holds that classically the word has an overplus of meaning which is not acquired and which, in its intent, is more original than goodness. It is exactly this overplus which Otto isolates as the nonrational factor. To express it, Otto coins the word "numinous" from the Latin *numen,* and maintains that it expresses a state which, wherever found, is completely *sui generis.*[29]

It manifests itself, says Otto, as a particular type of feeling,[30]

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[28] Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* p. 5.

[29] *Ibid.,* pp. 5-7. It is already obvious how this descriptive procedure is related to the philosophical antecedents whom we have discussed in the beginning of this chapter.

[30] Here feeling is not equivalent with emotion. Emotion is included as the reaction of man before the manifestation of the numinous. The experience

and can best be described by the designation *mysterium tremendum*. This category Otto then proceeds to analyze by speaking of *tremendum* under the categories of the awesome, overpoweringness, and energy or urgency. *Mysterium* is developed as fascination and wholly other. The former (*tremendum*) is the overplus side to what, in more rational language, is termed the grace and mercy of God, while all the other concepts are more related to the awesome and overpowering nature of God. It is the most direct bridge to the rational side of theological statements. The wholly other, on the other hand, is expressive not only in its own right, but is the category which elicits most the *sui generis* character of the numinous. It is the designation which is used considerably in the *Religious Essays* and therefore demands separate attention. It is also most directly related to the problem of this study.

Only after Otto has analyzed all the concepts is he willing to speak of the Holy. Then he speaks of it as a concept of value and as an *a priori* category. Value here is to be understood in the context of meaning of the nonrational delineated in the categories mentioned above. It is not unrelated to moral value, but Otto is clear that originally it did not have a moral connotation.[31] The "holy" is

> . . . the positive numinous value or worth, and to it corresponds on the side of the creature a numinous disvalue or "unworth." . . . A profoundly humble and heartfelt recognition of "the holy" may occur in particular experiences without being always or definitely charged or infused with the sense of moral demands. The "holy" will then be recognized as that which commands our respect, as that whose real value is to be acknowledged inwardly.[32]

The distance between this view of value and that which runs

itself has such an objective character that the sheerly emotional is eliminated. Further, the necessity of attempting the conceptual leaves the emotional as only one factor. Here also feeling is not apposed to thought.

[31] Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

in the Kantian-Ritschlian line is so obvious as to require no comment. Otto speaks of the numinous character of the Holy which needs to bestow something of its own before one can have communion with it. The Holy creates such a barrier that it cannot be characterized in its implications as the annulment of mistrust, as Ritschl did.[33] It is exactly in this chapter on the Holy as a category of value that Otto points to the holiness of God in the Christian religion. This God keeps an interval between himself and man, an interval, which is absolute and which cannot be overcome as a matter of course. It can be overcome through grace which is beyond man's power to apprehend. This view he contrasts to that which starts with morality and which makes God the personification of moral order endowed with love.[34] The Holy for Otto is the manifestation of value, but its value resides in the elicitation of the numinous aspect of God which overpowers but also fascinates him.

The Holy is also an *a priori* category, by nature wholly other. It would be a mistake, however, to think of the Holy as an *a priori* category only in nonrational or nonconceptual terms. Otto conceives rational categories, such as absoluteness, necessity, and substantiality, to be as *a priori* as the nonrational. For this view, he refers to the thought of the first critique of Kant, and to the knowledge which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself. Here it is important only to indicate that Otto, in a slight modification of Kant, maintains that the rational categories utilized in thinking of the divine manifestation are as *a priori* and *sui generis* as the nonrational factors. The point which Otto insists upon in the conception of both as *a priori,* is that the two belong together in a schematization which conveys a more developed understanding of the numinous. This is also what he means by

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 56. It is from this basis that it is difficult for me to see the source or even an analogy with Ritschl, as Davidson suggests. The theory of value or valuation in Otto appears to be on such a different basis from Ritschl that any comparison is difficult if not impossible.

[34] Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, p. 59.

an "ideogram"—it expresses the distinctive character of the Holy as nonrational in the most rational terms possible.

It is more important to see that the Holy, as an *a priori* category, as the wholly other, is characterized by two facets which are not always clearly distinguished by Otto. The first facet is related to Otto's interest in Kant, Schleiermacher, and Fries. Its suggestive aspect, as noted previously, lay in the possibility of a *sui generis* domain for religion. It is based upon Otto's feeling of the ontological manifestation of the *numen* over against all other ontological and epistemological considerations. For Otto, manifestation is ontological rather than psychological; it precedes all distinctions. The second facet, while it is also based on the fact of manifestation, suggests the qualitatively distinct character of the Holy rather than its ontological side. This side is elaborated in Otto's extensive references to primitive religions, the history of religions, and Christian theology.

These two aspects of Otto's thought are related to each other. The difficulty however is that it is not always clear when Otto implies one or the other or both. It will also be apparent, in the analysis which follows, that the nonrational is more distinctive of the second aspect. The problem which this raises will be explored later. At the moment, it is important that we examine the nature of the wholly other in its second aspect.

Of the various designations which Otto uses for the nonrational, it appears that the term "wholly other" encompasses the various meanings. Confining attention to this aspect is at least legitimate for this work. It can and must be said that the wholly other is beyond conceptual categories in so far as its qualitatively different character divides it from all existence. But its differentiating character can never mean that it does not concern one or that it has no positive meaning.[35] Otto affirms that it is exactly the nature of the wholly other to have meaning.

This is confirmed for him by its continual place in religion. He

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 13.

insists that the feeling for the wholly other is essential for primitive religions and the history of religions. In one of his essays Otto concludes with a remark which indicates that he believes religion, at its beginning, has the feeling of the wholly other.

> "Religion begins, not indeed as an already manufactured article, but, nevertheless, as an entity with its own distinctive features, for from the dawn of human life it is found as the *sensus numinus* [feeling of presence of the divine], an experience of the mysterious and an impulse toward the *mysterium*—an experience which breaks forth from the depth of the emotional life on the stimulus of outer attraction as the "sense of the wholly other." [36]

In the same article, he attempts to refute the theory of *Mana* in respect to the origin of religion, since it does not sufficiently include the wholly other.[37] In primitive life generally he feels that the line of demarcation between life and death is not as clear-cut as the line which divides this and that side of a wholly other mode of existence.[38] The feeling of the wholly other in dreams, Otto also considers significant.[39] In his book, *Gottheit und Gottheiten der Arier,* Otto speaks of that strange presence which is the wholly other and is present in the beginning of religion.[40] In the *Idea of the Holy,* Otto dramatically depicts this by declaring that religion itself is present at its commencement,[41] meaning that, however primitive the stage, there is nothing which precedes the religious dimension.

Otto writes most graphically of the wholly other in the history of religions, as contrasted with primitive religions, in *Mysticism, East and West.* Although the theme of the book centers in the similarities and differences in the teaching of Sankara, the Hindu

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[36] Otto, "The Sensus Numinus," in *Hibbert Journal,* Vol. XXX, 1931-32, p. 430.
[37] *Ibid.,* p. 427.
[38] *Ibid.,* p. 416.
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 296.
[40] Otto, *Gottheit und Gottheiten der Arier* (Giessen: Alfred Topelmann, 1932), p. 6.
[41] Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* p. 136.

mystic, and Eckhart, the Dominican mystic, this concept emerges clearly in the analysis of Being and of the *via negativa*. In theological discussion it is commonly heard that "being" is an abstract term without life. Otto's contention is that the opposite is true in the Eastern and Western mystical traditions. Here the affirmation is that Being itself is life,[42] and that Being is *sui generis* as nothing else is. It is never one thing beside other things, but that which is the ground of all things. In this sense, Being is beyond all comprehension for both Sankara and Eckhart.[43] It is above the contrasts of subject and object, and so on, because it is the source of that distinction.

Otto, of course, recognizes that Being is also a rational concept, though *a priori* by nature. But to do justice to the nonrational side he points out that both Sankara and Eckhart think of God as above Being. This is the negation of the concept Being but not of the reality suggested in the term. Beyond Being is transformed Being, that is, the wholly other.

> It becomes clear that for Eckhart as for Sankara the whole scheme of speculation about Being is in itself only a preliminary task, undertaken in the service of another and higher idea. In the light of this, Being itself takes on a new aspect. It is removed from the rational sphere to which it unquestionably belonged at first, and becomes simply an ideogram of the "Wholly Other," of the "Anyad," the alienum, the dissimile.[44]

The *via negativa*, suggests Otto, is the attempt to show the character of the wholly other by a series of negations which indicate the impossibility of expressing the nonrational and also its qualitative difference from all analogy. It must be clear that Otto does not understand the *via negativa* as commonly depicted. It is never the *deus ignotus* (unknown God). The *mysterium tremendum* always has a positive character, no matter

[42] Otto, *Mysticism, East and West*, tr. by Bertha L. Bracey and R. E. Payne (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 172.
[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

how hidden for conceptualization.[45] Otto also contends that the connection of the *via negativa* with the *via eminentiae* (i.e. way of describing God as having all positive qualities in an eminent way) shows its positive character, though the *via negativa* transcends the *via eminentiae*. In the *via negativa*

> the Godhead is defined by negative predicates, and the purpose of these is exclusion. . . . This, however, is not meant to indicate impoverishment or emptiness, but the exclusion of all definition as limitation, impoverishment, or creatureliness. So it is *negatio* as *negatio negationis* and therefore . . . it is intended as the very highest positive. And so the *via negationis* emerges not as contrary to the *via eminentiae*, not even as a merely parallel mode of expression, but really as a continuation of the *via eminentiae* itself.[46]

Understood in this way, Otto believes that the negative theology has a real contribution to make, and that the *via negativa* is an essential part of mysticism valid for all theological thinking.

For Otto, mysticism never violates the sense of the wholly other. He rejects the notion that mysticism is simply union or absorption into the ultimate. He agrees that for the mystics, God is hidden in the soul, but contends that the soul itself is completely other in mystical thinking. The soul itself is mystery, and in the mystical vision there is always the feeling of the wholly other which cannot be eradicated, and which is often intensified.[47] Thus, when God is in his soul, man himself is the greatest mystery and is challenged by the wholly other whose vision threatens and also fascinates him.[48]

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[45] Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, pp. 2, 13.

[46] Otto, *Mysticism, East and West*, p. 110. The same point is made in *Idea of the Holy*, p. 39.

[47] Otto, *Mysticism, East and West*, pp. 98, 144.

[48] It seems to me that it is on this point that a distinction ought to be made between pre-Reformation mysticism and post-Reformation mysticism which has been influenced by the Enlightenment. The inner light would have been impossible for the line of mystics which runs from Dionysius the Areopagite through Erigena, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, Suso, Eckhart, St. Theresa, and St. John of the Cross. Although for these men God was in the soul, the soul was a mystery. When the mystery of man disappeared

Greek religions also manifest the place of the wholly other, writes Otto. He agrees with the statement of Xenophanes that if oxen could paint, they would depict the gods as oxen. But he disagrees with Xenophanes' contention that man paints his gods as man. The actual situation in Greek religion, suggests Otto, is that the humanized gods represent Greek religion in its decline, as illustrated, for example, in Homer. Of Greek religion, Otto writes:

> The true Pallas Athene is not the humanized Athenian noblewoman portrayed by Phidias, nor the charming girl of Myro, but rather that uncanny, owlish being which haunted the ancient Attic rampart, and to which Homer bears reluctant testimony when he speaks of his "glaukopian" goddess, the "owl-faced" Athene. And awful majesty is the attribute of the ancient *Boōpis*, the cow-headed Hera, rather than of the matronly spouse of Zeus. When the goddesses and gods became elegant, charming, and human, belief in them was not at its prime, as would be the case if the anthropomorphic view were correct, but was already in its decline, and they were being superseded by the foreign gods from Egypt and from the Far East for the very reason that these gods again were strange and "wholly other." [49]

Aside from Luther, Otto particularly mentions Augustine and Chrysostom in the context of Christian theology. In the *Religious Essays* Otto speaks of the *Aliud Valde* of Augustine, as expressed in the *Confessions*. Before the wholly other, Augustine speaks of being shrivelled up like a spider's web. But he also finds the unchangeable light, exalted not only above his eye and spirit, but actually wholly other from all these.[50] Thus, for Augustine both dread and wonder, terribleness and mercy are related to the God who is wholly other. And this experience, it would seem from the personal confessions of Augustine, is more than a remnant of neoplatonism.

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in the Enlightenment, the mystery of God also disappeared. It was then only that the inner light was possible.

[49] *Religious Essays*, p. 79. For the elaboration of a similar view, see Professor Henri Frankfort's volume, *Kingship and the Gods*.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

In like manner Otto points to Chrysostom, whose sermons break forth with the inconceivable and unapproachable in God. They are not the result of any school of theology or philosophy, but indicate a profound feeling that God cannot be approached in his majesty, though he has and does come to men in grace and mercy. Chrysostom makes much of St. Paul's formulation that God dwells in light unapproachable. For him, the incomprehensible may elude conception but not questioning, but the unapproachable excludes questioning as well because it is removed from man's grasp.[51] This does not eliminate meaning, as every false interpretation of the negative theology suggests. In fact, it is in conjunction with Chrysostom that Otto makes one of his best pleas for the validity of the negative theology on religious grounds.

> This "negative theology" does not mean that faith and feeling are dissipated and reduced to nothing; on the contrary, it contains within it the loftiest spirit of devotion, and it is out of such "negative" attributes that Chrysostom fashions the most solemn confessions and prayers. He thereby shows once more that feeling and experience reach far beyond conceiving, and that a conception negative in form may often become the symbol (. . . ideogram) for a content of meaning which, if absolutely unutterable, is none the less in the highest degree positive. And the example of Chrysostom at the same time shows that a "negative theology" can and indeed must arise, not only from the "infusion of Hellenistic speculation and nature mysticism," but from purely and genuinely religious roots, namely, the experience of the numinous.[52]

One of the places where Otto feels that this concept is most clearly expressed is in the pages of the Bible. In the *Religious Essays* he points to *El* or *Elohim* and its connection with *Rua'h,* or Spirit. This is never defined, suggests Otto, and is an expression of the wholly other.[53]

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[51] Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* p. 185.

[52] *Ibid.,* p. 189.

[53] Otto, *Religious Essays,* pp. 31, 34. Compare the *Idea of the Holy,* p. 77, where *Elohim* is more rational than *Yahweh.*

In the Bible Otto also finds that the rational and the nonrational are related in a way which is not characteristic of most religions. He admits that the history of religion is the history of the increasing rationalization of the divine or numinous and that this is a legitimate enterprise.[54] But it is in the Bible that these two elements have been kept in their proper perspective.

> The venerable religion of Moses marks the beginning of a process which from that point onward proceeds with ever increasing momentum, by which "the numinous" is throughout rationalized and moralized, i.e. charged with ethical import, until it becomes "the holy" in the fullest sense of the word. The culmination of the process is found in the Prophets and in the Gospels.[55]

Of the prophets, Otto thinks that Deutero-Isaiah is the classic example of the Holy One of Israel, in whom clear conceptions and the numinous are combined in their most powerful way.[56] He thinks that this is also true in the New Testament, particularly in the impression which Christ made upon the world. Numinous as well as conceptual categories are utilized in the Gospel records to describe him.[57] The kingdom, which he came to proclaim, is itself something wholly other, though related to man's existence.[58]

Although Otto points to the basic character of the nonrational as the point of departure for religious perception, he insists upon the rational in proper conjunction with the nonrational. He thinks that sections of the Old Testament have too much of the exclusively numinous, though he always has a positive appreciation for this factor. The prophet Ezekiel is so nonrational that Otto believes the rational is lacking.[59] But it must be noted that for Otto the lack of the rational merely means that a factor is

[54] *Idea of the Holy,* p. 113.
[55] *Ibid.,* p. 77.
[56] *Ibid.,* p. 78.
[57] *Ibid.,* p. 86.
[58] *Ibid.,* p. 85. See also Otto, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man,* pp. 147-49.
[59] Otto, *Idea of the Holy,* pp. 74, 79.

missing. It never means that the nonrational *must* become schematized or balanced or even reduced in its power.

This problem is focused in Otto's analyses of Job and of the problems of predestination and wrath. Otto suggests that the answer in the book of Job is neither that of Paul, in the sense of the impossibility of a theodicy, nor the notion that God's ways are higher than man's ways. Of the conclusion of Job, in reference to the notion that God's ends are different from man's, Otto writes:

> If you start from rational ideas and concepts, you absolutely *thirst* for such a conclusion to the discourse. But nothing of the kind follows; nor does the chapter intend at all to suggest such teleological reflections or solutions.[60]

For the mind of Job, Otto finds the solution elsewhere.

> In the last resort it relies on something quite different from anything that can be exhaustively rendered in rational concepts, namely, on the sheer absolute wondrousness that transcends thought, on the *mysterium*, presented in its pure, nonrational form. . . . Assuredly these beasts [wild ass, unicorn, etc., in text] would be the most unfortunate examples that one could hit upon if searching for evidences of the purposefulness of the divine "wisdom." But they, no less than all the previous examples and the whole context, tenor, and sense of the entire passage, do express in masterly fashion the downright stupendousness, the wellnigh daemonic and wholly incomprehensible character of the eternal creative power; how, incalculable and "wholly other," it mocks at all conceiving but can yet stir the mind to its depths, fascinate and overbrim the heart. . . .The *mysterium* simply as such would merely . . . be a part of the "absolute inconceivability" of the *numen*, and that, though it might strike Job utterly dumb, could not convict him inwardly. That of which we are conscious is rather an *intrinsic value* in the incomprehensible—a value inexpressible, positive, and "fascinating." This is incommensurable with thoughts of rational human teleology and is not assimilated to them: it remains in all its mystery. But it is as it becomes

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

felt in consciousness that *Elohim* is justified and at the same time Job's soul brought to peace.[61]

Here it is evident that the nonrational is most decisive. It is also apparent that it is not schematized with the rational, as in other areas of the Old Testament. If Otto were completely consistent, he would have to show that this extremely nonrational element receives its fullest expression in schematization with the rational. Here, however, it appears that any ideogram would detract from the heightened state of the nonrational. Perhaps there are cases in which the nonrational cannot be schematized, such as in the problem of theodicy. Here the nonrational in its hidden but positive character may be almost exclusively decisive. But Otto nowhere adequately deals with this problem. His own formulations of the nonrational at times seem to violate his suggestion of the necessary schematization with the rational. Had he indicated areas of schematization and areas where schematization were not possible, he might have removed some ambiguity.

The same problem confronts us in Otto's analysis of predestination. He first suggests that predestination must be separated from election. The latter is the confession of preordainment unto salvation and in itself has nothing to do with the notion that all men are preordained either unto salvation or unto damnation. In Paul, suggests Otto, the doctrine of predestination has nothing to do with the notion of God being different in his ways from man, nor with the idea, such as Zwingli elaborated, that God is the cause of all things. For Paul,

> . . . the religious conception in the notion of predestination is nothing but that "creature-consciousness," that self-abasement and the annulment of personal strength and claims and achievements in the presence of the transcendent, as such. The numen, overpoweringly experienced, becomes the all in all.[62]

[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 82, 83.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Having thrown the problem of predestination out of its deterministic context and indicated its place in the numinous, Otto concerns himself with the religious experience this rational conception seeks to convey, namely, "creature-consciousness." But this does not solve the problem of the relation of the conceptual to the nonrational. Otto rightly suggests that where the nonrational is felt at its heights, such as in Islam and in forms of mysticism, predestination is intensified, and a sort of rational expression of irrationalism results.[63] But what is the precise relation of the conceptual to the nonconceptual in this problem? Otto can do no more than give a suggestion.

> Predestination . . . is an attempted statement, in conceptual terms and by *analogy*, of something that at bottom is incapable of explication by concepts. Fully justified in this sense as an analogical expression, it is wholly unjustified . . . if its character as analogy is missed so that it is taken as an adequate formulation of theological theory.[64]

But this only states the problem, and suggests that it is one of analogy. Otto gives no hint as to how and to what extent analogy can be used.

A part of the religious dimension which Otto does find in predestination is that the life of man, as creative, is in the hands of God. If one side of this aspect is brought home to man in election, the other is made clear in God's wrath. Otto is opposed to those who think of wrath as a rational concept. Rationally, it means arbitrariness and leads to its rejection, as in Ritschl. Nor is it to be equated with God's indignation or punishment for moral transgression. In the Old Testament, Otto insists, wrath is often inexplicable and without moral qualities. He thus points to the *numen* or the *tremendum* as the basis for the feeling of wrath. Wrath indicates that man stands before this manifestation with fear and terror, but never without attraction. Wrath, for Otto, can be said to be a term which is on the border line

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

between the nonrational and the rational, in which any swing from one side to the other means the distortion of the fundamental experience of God's rightful wrath against man.[65]

From this picture, it is possible to say that for Otto the nonrational has two very distinctive characteristics. It is suggestive that the only two places in which Otto directly points to Luther's *deus absconditus* are in this context. This confirms the thesis that Otto's description of the nonrational is an elaboration of the hidden God as first discovered in Luther, and as illuminated by materials not present in Luther.

The first of these characteristics is that the nonrational is the nonconceptual, but not the unknowable. Revelation and Luther's *deus absconditus* belong here.

> "Revelation" does not mean a *mere* passing over into the intelligible and comprehensible. Something may be profoundly and intimately known in feeling for the bliss it brings or the agitation it produces, and yet the understanding may find no concept for it. To *know* and to *understand conceptually* are two different things, are often even mutually exclusive and contrasted. The mysterious obscurity of the numen is by no means tantamount to unknowableness. Assuredly the "*deus absconditus et incomprehensibilis*" (hidden and incomprehensible God) was for Luther no "*deus ignotus*" (unknown God). And so, too, St. Paul "knows" the Peace, which yet "passeth understanding." [66]

The second characteristic based upon the first, is the terrible, mysterious nature of God, expressed in such sections as the thirty-eighth chapter of Job, in predestination, or in the wrath of God. It conveys the seriousness of the nonrational. At times it can hardly be connected with the rational. Here the nonrational is not only above the rational, but often is felt to be against it. The nonrational or numinous can reproduce the

> . . . line of thought of Job, as can be seen now and then in Luther in his notion of the *deus absconditus*—the thought, namely, that God

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

himself is not only *above* every human grasp, but in *antagonism* to it.[67]

These are the two facets, it seems to me, that Otto emphasizes in his work. They are also the two points where the hidden God is of primary importance for him. The point of difficulty is that Otto's attempt to show the relation of the rational to the nonrational leads to a certain ambiguity. He suggests that the rational is necessary, but also indicates how in predestination, and so on, it is exactly the connection with the rational which has introduced complications.

It is not necessary, however, to enumerate the difficulties in the thought of Otto. It is more significant to see his work in the context he thought it occupied. He felt that all his studies were directed to the enrichment of Christian theology, particularly in the *Idea of the Holy*.

> Our line of inquiry in *The Idea of the Holy* was directed towards Christian theology and not towards religious history or the psychology of religion. We sought, by means of an investigation of the Holy, and its irrational as well as its rational content with their mutual interactions, to prepare ourselves for a better and more definite understanding of the experience of God revealed in the Bible and especially in the New Testament.[68]

In how far Otto moved in this direction is another problem. There is evidence that he vacillated in his feelings toward Christianity as a personal faith and as distinct from other religions. It is evident that the neo-Reformation theologians do not admit that he stands in the historic Christian understanding. It must be admitted that Otto has not systematically set his ideas into the context of Christian theology. His book on the *Kingdom of God and the Son of Man* has elements of this feeling, but it is too specialized for any judgment. Where Otto does deal with Christian theological categories, in reference to such problems as

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[68] Otto, *Religious Essays*, p. 30.

election and predestination, he has not elaborated the full implications.

In short, what one wishes is that Otto had carried the immense discoveries which he made in the whole realm of religion directly into the context of Christian theology and thinking. This is a problem which is ignored in neo-Reformation theology. It is ignored from the other side by Otto.

Most important for this study, however, is Otto's intensive documentation of the concept of the wholly other or hidden God who makes himself known positively to man without relinquishing his mystery and awesomeness, either in nature or operation. This aspect Otto has also emphasized more extensively in his interpretation of Luther than any other historian.

Chapter IV

THE CORRELATIVE CHARACTER OF REVELATION AND HIDDENNESS

The strict correlation of the revelation of God in Christ and God's hiddenness divides the neo-Reformation theology of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth from most of their predecessors and contemporaries. The self-evident character of God's love in Ritschlian thought is outrightly rejected, while much of the interpretation of Luther is called into question. The manifestation of God as the wholly other is repudiated as it stands, but it is accepted with the proviso that it is meaningful within the confines of Christian revelation.

In spite of considerable agreement concerning the nature of revelation and the theological enterprise, the two foremost Continental exponents of neo-Reformation thought are so divergent in important nuances that separate consideration is imperative. The quarrels which divided them, petty as they appear to many of us, reflect significant differences in point of departure which ought not be glossed over because of general agreement. The differences are particularly crucial in the understanding of the *deus absconditus*. For Brunner, hiddenness refers primarily, though not exclusively to God apart from Christ. It is dialectically related to the content of revelation. For Barth, a vigorous em-

phasis upon revelation in Christ as the point of departure demands that the concept of hiddenness be understood in a more organic relation to revelation. In both, however, the insistence upon the necessary relation of revelation and hiddenness carries a new sense for the integrity and vigor of the Christian message.

A. HIDDENNESS AND REVELATION

Brunner declares that before God is known through self-communication, he is absolute mystery. He is the wholly other as a person, and this transcendent, unknown, hidden God must speak in order to be known.[1] Unless God makes himself known to man in his Word, in the apprehension of the meaning of Jesus Christ, God remains hidden. This means that all attempts on the part of man to understand and to know God, summarized for Brunner in such concepts as metaphysics, the absolute, or the numinous, belong to human reason and do not communicate from beyond all human possibilities.[2] In short, human reason ends before the bar of hiddenness and does not see that God must speak out of this hiddenness to man if he is to know who and what God is.

> The Word of God comes to us from the further side, from beyond the border-line which separates God and man; it is God's own Word about himself, his secret, based on the fact that he alone is God; it is something in which the world, man, and human reason have no part, that which is reserved to God himself, that which separates him, the Creator, from his creature. The Word of God, revelation, means the issuing forth of this hidden One from his concealment through God's incomprehensible self-communication.[3]

In *The Christian Doctrine of God*,[4] Brunner encompasses the

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[1] Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World*, p. 30. Also, *God and Man*, p. 57.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[3] Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 238.

[4] These pages were originally written before the appearance of the English translation. Although the German book is the source for all comments and general references, quotations are taken from the English translation in order to facilitate reference for the English reader.

two aspects of revelation—God's separation from all creation and his communication to man—under the concept of holiness. Revelation establishes God's holiness, his separateness from all things. It is not that God is conceived as the wholly other. He wills to be the wholly other. He sets boundaries beyond which one cannot pass, and he wants no one to be like him. This is why he is a jealous God. God wants to be recognized as God, and this means an intolerence of anything which infringes upon that prerogative. But the converse is equally true. It is of the nature of holiness to reveal itself.[5] It is of the essence of God to reveal himself and to reveal his incomprehensible love. Man does not affirm that God has an essence which he then reveals, but that the very essence of God, as exemplified in holiness, is revelation itself. Revelation is thus not merely the medium through which God shows man what he is, but is the flowering of the godly essence itself. This is exactly what it means to be the loving One.[6] If therefore it is of the essence of God that he is the revealing One, it is also of the essence of God that he is the loving One.[7] Revelation and love are one. Love therefore is not an attribute, but God in his activity. There is no "being for himself" which is not also a "being for us."[8] One cannot speak of God in himself and then of God's love, else one will return to the unfortunate path of Greek metaphysics which confused the early church.[9] Brunner wishes it to be clear, however, that he does not mean that creation therefore is a necessary part of God's essence. God could be without a creation but does not wish it that way. One must rather affirm that creation is the

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[5] Brunner, *Die Christliche Lehre von Gott, Dogmatik*, Vol. I, p. 171.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 200.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

manifestation of him who wills it for the sake of community, for the sake of his self-communication.[10]

The double aspect of God which defines his relation to man is therefore the will to be recognized, first, as the Creator who is essentially different from the creature, second, as the One whose nature it is to impart himself to the creation and to establish community with it. The serious nature of God's intent to establish community is apparent in the consequence of its rejection; the holy and not self-evident character of this will to communicate is protected by the emphasis upon the separateness of the God who makes himself known. These two aspects of God's holiness, which Brunner calls the dialectic of wrath and love, define the two sides of God's hiddenness. The wrathful God is the hidden God who stands against the man who does not see him in his full revelation in Christ. The God of love is the God who is apprehended as he veils himself in his revelation and who is therefore partially hidden in his disclosure. Both aspects Brunner finds superbly delineated in the writings of Luther.

1. *The* deus absconditus *as the wrathful God*

Brunner admits a direct dependence upon Luther for his understanding of the wrath of God. In the first volume of his *Dogmatik*, he states that he can do no better than give a short exposition of Luther's views on the wrath of God, which is generally to be identified with the *deus absconditus*.[11] This side is

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 200, 201, 202.

[11] As a secondary motif for the development of Luther's ideas, Brunner suggests that a summary of Luther's views will give an understanding of him which has been missed by all interpreters of Luther, with the exception of Theodosius Harnack. The reference here is to a work by Theodosius Harnack, father of Adolf Harnack, entitled, *Luthers Theologie, neue Aufl.* (München: B.I., 1927). It is interesting to note that Theodosius Harnack emphasized the place of wrath in the thought of Luther, while his son, Adolf Harnack, wished to expunge this as the remnants of scholasticism. In fact, Brunner always expresses his indebtedness to T. Harnack for leading him to a proper understanding of Luther's thought. The elder Harnack had written his work before Ritschl and the Ritschlian school began its work on Luther. The book was attacked by Ritschl,

even more graphically discussed by Brunner in an earlier article, *"Der Zorn Gottes und die Versöhnung durch Christus."* But the point in both is the same. Brunner is concerned to emphasize that for Luther wrath is a fundamental reality of God, not merely a misunderstanding from the side of man. Since the fall, man stands under the *deus absconditus,* or the *deus nudus,* who is unbearable to the creature like the uncovered rays of the sun. It is the terribleness of God apart from Christ. This impact is not lessened but is aggravated by the law which stands over man. It leads him into despair before the terrible majesty of God.[12] In fact, in the *Dogmatik,* Brunner contends that in Luther speculation and law, the *deus absolutus* and works, belong together in that they lead to the terrible *deus absconditus.*[13]

What Brunner maintains is that the wrath of God is an objective fact in the thought of Luther, and that all who have not seen God in Christ stand under this consuming fire.[14] He also con-

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and generally ignored by Ritschlians as well as other interpreters. Today it is accorded a place with the early great works on Luther, in spite of the limitations placed upon it by the fact that it antedated the Weimar edition of Luther's Works. It is to be expected that Brunner does not agree with many of the Luther interpreters examined in the preceding pages. Of these, he singles out Holl, Elert, and Ritschl for particular attention. He admits that Holl tried to go behind Ritschl to Luther in respect to justification, but affirms that his analysis was never connected with the Mediator nor with an eschatological understanding. In a later work he indicates that Holl was mistaken in making conscience central in Luther, since it was exactly conscience which was the enemy of God for Luther. Elert, on the other hand, is attacked because he insisted that for Luther, faith made the idea of predestination superfluous. It is Ritschl who is attacked most directly. Affirming that Ritschl really did try to come to grips with the Reformation, Brunner bluntly states that his treatment of the Reformation made Luther appear as a modern religious man in the Kantian sense, and that whatever did not fit this preconceived notion was discarded as the remnant of the Catholic middle ages.

[12] Brunner, *"Der Zorn Gottes und die Versöhnung durch Christus,"* p. 104.

[13] Brunner, *Dogmatik,* Vol. I, pp. 178-79.

[14] It must be noted that in an earlier work, *The Mediator,* Brunner does state that this type of expression in Luther is dangerous. However, he does not elaborate the point. See *The Mediator,* p. 282.

tends, however, that for Luther this is not the actual nature of God. Holiness and love alone are his nature. Wrath is the reaction of God, the necessary reaction of the holiness of God against sin; and since sin resides in the heart of man, wrath is inevitable. God's love and his majesty require it.[15] It is a consequence of the unending, serious character of the love of God.[16]

Faith for Luther, Brunner reminds us, is often defined as breaking through God's wrath to his mercy. God in Christ alone is alive. Apart from Christ, he is darkness, death, and nothing but hiddenness in the sense of unknowableness and wrath. Therefore Luther defined wrath as the strange work of God, and love in Christ as his real work. God must use his wrath to bring to guilt; he must wound to make alive in Christ. Where wrath does not bring a man to faith, there is real condemnation. To the unbeliever, therefore, the suffering and death of Christ is itself a strange work, whereas to the believer it is experienced as God's truest work.[17]

Wrath, then, to the unbeliever is an objective reality emanating from the nature of God himself. But it is not identical with the true nature which is revealed in Christ, and known to those in faith. God's *opus proprium* (own work) is Christ, and true knowledge of God, therefore, is had only in Christ. Brunner himself follows this interpretation of Luther with no significant variation, except in the special problem of predestination. For him also, the hidden God is the angry God, the God who is set against man.

> Apart from the revelation to man, God is the *deus absconditus*, the hidden God, the God whose Heart man cannot know, whose Nature he only knows so far as he knows it from himself and the world—yet these are sinful and corrupt—hence the God he knows is the angry God.[18]

[15] Brunner, *"Der Zorn Gottes . . ."* pp. 108-10.
[16] Brunner, *Dogmatik*, Vol. I, p. 177.
[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77.
[18] Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 296.

It is not that God therefore is simply absent from man's knowledge in respect to what he really is, but that apart from Christ he speaks to man as the angry God. In this sense he is not absolutely hidden.[19] Hiddenness is not the same as agnosticism which denies any knowledge of God. The wrath of God means that no one is completely unrelated to God, though he may be unrelated to God as he is in his self-disclosure.[20]

Expounding the much-debated passage in St. Paul's first chapter of Romans, Brunner affirms as anthropological fact that man has some knowledge of God, though because of sin it is idolatric and impersonal. And when God is most clearly seen apart from Christ, he is known as the wrathful God who has not been received in his true nature. On the other hand, where, on the basis of his giving of himself in Christ, community is established, God's holiness is fulfilled in love. There the distinction between the Creator and the creature is recognized, but community between them is created in accord with God's will for himself and man. But where this self-impartation is neither received nor known, there Brunner thinks that God's holiness can only manifest itself as wrath, as the *deus absconditus.*

It is thus apparent that hiddenness has two facets. It indicates that God is not really known for what he is apart from revelation, and that his being known apart from his revelation is the *deus absconditus* which signifies wrath. It involves the knowledge of God apart from Christ, and the knowledge of God in Christ. Wrath, as correlated with the former, is not to be completely distinguished from the latter since it grows out of God's real nature. Hence it is to be taken as real, and not simply as a subjective reaction on the part of man. The wrath of God is real, but it is not his inmost nature. Faith, then, as in Luther, means breaking through this wrath to see God's mercy revealed in Christ.

[19] Brunner, *God and Man,* pp. 115-18.
[20] *Ibid.,* pp. 115-18.

2. *The contrast between veiling and hiddenness*

God's disclosure of himself in Christ, writes Brunner of Luther's views, is a merciful veiling of himself. It is as if God could only come to man if he took a veiled form, that is, if his terrible majesty were covered as he approached the creature, who himself could neither grasp nor endure God's majesty. At the same time this veiling imparts the genuine essence of God in his love and will toward community. It is important to note that this analysis of Luther's concept of veiling points primarily to the necessity of veiling on the basis of the terribleness of God rather than on the structure of veiling as in previous interpretations.

The veiling of God in revelation is a form of hiddenness for Luther, writes Brunner, but it is not identical with the *deus absconditus* or the *deus nudus*. The *deus absconditus* and the *deus velatus* (veiled God) are contrasted, while the *deus velatus* and the *deus revelatus* are identified.

> This *deus velatus* is also the *deus revelatus*. The form of the *velatio* is precisely the possibility of the *revelatio*. This concealing is therefore not a real hiding of God's Face, but it is indeed the real unveiling. Therefore, Luther does not speak in this connection of the *deus absconditus*. The *deus absconditus* is the really hidden God, he who is really not to be known in his true being, the *deus absolutus*, the God of wrath. He is the God, as we have him outside of Christ, hence he is also the God of the Law, "which is intolerable for the conscience." [21]

Brunner follows the distinction between hiddenness and revelation. For the believer, God is no longer hidden. God is not different in himself than in his revelation. But this does not mean that God is fully known. God's essence is apprehended through a veil which remains. God is never self-evident. He is love, but he is holy love. Holiness implies a differentiation and a will toward disclosure. Hence, love is always *made* known, it

[21] Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God, Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 172.

is never simply known. When it is not properly seen or accepted, it manifests itself as wrath. The holiness of God, with the double side of wrath and love, distinguishes Brunner's understanding from the Ritschlians'. For them, he writes, redemption is nothing else than the setting aside of man's misunderstanding that God is wrathful or a strict judge, because in truth for them, he is a loving Father. So they start with the sentence, God is love; it is not even born out of revelation.

In contrast to Ritschl, the structure of veiling makes it impossible to grasp God at any moment or to take away the mystery through revelation.

What is the meaning of this fact that veiling and revelation coincide? That God remains a mystery to us even in revelation, that even in imparting his very Self to us he withholds himself, that even where he comes closest to us, he must be sought, that even where he is most fully present we have not the power simply to take hold of him without further ado. This is the "guile" of God, which is simply another word for his Grace, his Love, which wills nothing other than this, that we should possess him in reality and in truth. For a God who even in revealing himself were not at the same time the hidden God, the mysterious, the Lord, the One who cannot be possessed, would not be the God who as perfect Love is also the Holy and Unapproachable.[22]

The type of veiling to which Brunner characteristically refers, however, is the apprehension of God in the *person* of Christ. It means that God does not reveal himself directly as in paganism.[23] It means further that God has veiled himself so completely that only faith can recognize in the man Jesus the Son of God.[24]

Here the form of the communication is mystery. Jesus Christ has not imparted himself directly, in order that the decision to which he calls us may be really the decision of faith. The category of this life—in contrast with every other life—is mystery, in the essential fundamental meaning of the word, the "incognito." [25]

[22] Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 334.
[23] Brunner, *The Word and the World*, p. 6.
[24] Brunner, *The Theology of Crisis*, p. 41.
[25] Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 337.

Any other kind of communication, i.e. a communication which is not veiled, would be compulsion and would therefore destroy the freedom of decision. The difficulty, however, arises in that God's hiddenness in Christ, particularly in the cross, is so great that one would not look for God in this form. Yet exactly when God is seemingly deserted, when Jesus himself feels the wrath of God, God has chosen to make himself known. Here is the hiddenness of God which is the point of revelation.[26] So Brunner fastens upon the self-disclosure of God, which is meant for the life of man in relation with God, but which for all that remains the utmost mystery, and is apprehended only in faith.

3. *Predestination and the mystery of God*

Although Brunner agrees with the general structure of Luther's thought on the question of the holiness of God, he does not follow Luther's early views on the concept of predestination. Before the year 1525, contends Brunner, Luther took the wrath of God so seriously that he accepted a double decree and denied that God willed that all should be saved. Brunner also finds this thought in *The Bondage of the Will.* Subsequently Luther believed God wills that all should be saved and that nonacceptance is man's fault and in no way related to the decree of God.[27] This change, suggests Brunner, grows out of the realization that the double decree was speculation based upon the scholastic distinction between the *voluntas signi* and the *voluntas beneplaciti.*[28]

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 442.

[27] Brunner, *Dogmatik*, Vol. I, p. 372.

[28] There is another area, suggests Brunner, in which Luther faced the same type of problem as in the case of predestination, namely, in his explication of "omnipotence." Here also Brunner finds Luther was under the influence of the late scholastic period, with its concept of *velle absoluta* (absolute will). This interpretation, consistent with the notion of double predestination, leaves the freedom of man out of account and emphasizes the *Allwirksamkeit* of God. But Luther here found a way out, not by a new concept, but by suggesting that omnipotence belongs to the realm of wrath and the hidden God. Thus, suggests Brunner, he was relieved of his problem, though he did not come to an understanding of omnipotence on the basis of revelation. This happened only in his sermons, and

The latter Luther finally equated with unsearchable election or rejection and saw that it involved disputation concerning the *nuda divinitas* (naked Divinity), which one should flee like the devil himself.[29] God wants one to look only at the Word of God, which is equivalent to Jesus Christ and his grace.

Luther discovered in this, writes Brunner, not only that one ought not speculate on the hidden God, but that if one looks at revelation one will discover that the inmost being of God, God's being in himself, is identical with God's being for man.[30] According to Brunner, Luther did not rework his theological statements in line with this new discovery.

Brunner gladly accepts this new direction in Luther. He does not, however, raise the question of its relation to the problem of the wrath of God, except to note that Luther increasingly applied wrath to the guilt and wickedness of man and increasingly acknowledged the holy love of God as the mystery of God's essence. This view of wrath does not necessarily contradict that developed in the first section of this chapter. But one does miss any attempt on the part of Brunner to bring these rather difficult phases of Luther into some total picture.

Brunner himself also rejects the notion of double predestination in the sense of a double decree. Such a notion is counter to human responsibility and decision. Historically it comes out of the neoplatonic side of Augustine and from Calvin's torturous use of the Bible. But he also rejects any view which does not take the possibility of rejection seriously. Consequently, he sets himself against Barth, who maintains that no one can finally escape the saving activity of God.[31] Brunner prefers a concept of pre-

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not in his theological exposition. Thus Brunner finds that Luther's analysis of omnipotence is consistent with the earlier analysis of the hidden God.

[29] Brunner, *Dogmatik*, Vol. I, p. 373.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

[31] Brunner, *Dogmatik*, Vol. I, pp. 346ff. This problem is not discussed in the section on Barth, since for him it does not have any bearing upon the *deus absconditus*.

destination which is related to the decision of faith. But concomitant is the serious character of God which means rejection if one does not accept him. Brunner, however, does not address himself to the question of the mystery involved in the decision of faith. He does make some observation on the relation of God's inmost being to revelation as it relates to the problem raised by the concept of predestination. For the most part, he emphasizes the oneness of God's nature within himself and his nature as manifested in revelation. His analysis of God's wrath along the path of Luther's *opus alienum* (strange work) also signifies that in his inmost being God is not wrathful in essence but only in the holiness which expresses itself against the man who refuses to accept him—who is not led to accept his real work and intent in Christ. There is no will in God behind his will to self-communication. He declares the unity of the nature and revelation of God to be the central teaching in the concept of the trinity. Neither here, nor in the previous instance, does the identification of God's essence and his revelation erase the mystery of God's self-communication. Their identification is itself a declaration which can be made on the basis of revelation. It is not a superfluous problem, as in Ritschlian thought.

But Brunner also means more than the mystery of self-communication. He implies that in revelation a mystery remains in the Godhead—to be accepted for what it is and honored as such.

> He who reveals to us the true God is indeed wholly God, but this revelation does not *exhaust* the whole mystery of God. . . . Revelation does not remove the mystery of God; on the contrary, the revelation deepens the mystery of God. The revelation issues from the mystery of God; it reveals to us the heart of God. But all that can be said about God, all that the Son can disclose to us of the Nature of God, still leaves a residue of mystery: something which can never be said; something unfathomably mysterious. Even the revealed God remains a hidden God, and He wills to be worshiped as the one who is Hidden and Unfathomable. "God dwells in Light unapproachable"—this applies not only to the time before, but to the time after, the revelation

through Christ, and in spite of it. *Pater est fons totius trinitatis* [the Father is the Fountain of the whole Trinity]. The Mystery of God stands at the beginning and at the end of revelation.[32]

There is certainly no contradiction between the affirmation of hiddenness and mystery in the Godhead in this sense and the contention that God's nature and revelation are identical. Such formulation, in fact, points to the depth of God and safeguards the concept of revelation. Revelation is then not other than God's genuine nature, nor is it simply to be identified with God without a basis in his self-disclosure.

The seriousness of salvation and the possibility of rejection lead Brunner however to overstate the problem of the relation of God in himself and God in Christ in the direction of two distinct provinces in God. Wrath is then no longer the consequence of the seriousness of God, but his terrible nature apart from Christ. In fact, the relation between the *deus nudus* and the *opus alienum* in Brunner's own thought and in his analysis of Luther remains ambiguous. The Father as the fountain source of the Trinity means finally for Brunner that God can be other than he is in his revelation.

> There are works of God which as such are precisely not works of the Son. . . . God freely determines himself for the Son, for community, and for love; hence, also, He is free to determine his Holiness as wrath, and—*cogente malitia hominum* [forced by human sin]—to work doom. This freedom of God, to effect salvation and doom, light and darkness, life and death, is the unfathomable mystery of God, which even in the revelation of the Son remains a mystery. The mystery of God is not exhausted by the Son; for *"pater est fons totius trinitatis"; God can* be other than the One revealed in Jesus Christ as Light and Life, namely, the Hidden God, who as such operates not in the Word and its light, but in that which is not "word" or "knowledge," in darkness. This is the *Deus nudus,* who does not veil himself in the form of the Son of Man—the terrible Majesty, which is "intolerable to all creation." [33]

[32] Brunner, *Dogmatics,* Vol. I, pp. 225-26.

[33] *Ibid.,* p. 232.

Such a statement calls into question the consistency of affirming the oneness of essence and revelation, since the mystery behind revelation is different from God's otherness understood utterly apart from revelation. Or, at the least, that is the way Brunner develops it. The difficulty with Brunner's writing, here as elsewhere, is that he does not always relate diverse elements into a unified picture. It is, of course, true that he maintains that such elements must be held together in a dialectical way. But even dialectic requires an inner logic and consistency. When Brunner therefore finishes his section in the *Dogmatics* on this problem, he has only stated the problem which needs a solution, without realizing that he has done no more.

> The Biblical message contains in itself the dialectical tension between wrath and Mercy, between the Holiness which is identical with Love, and the Holiness which, as the wrath of God, is in opposition to it. Human thought, however, is always trying to evade this dialectic. It desires and demands an obvious unity. For this there are two possibilities: Calvin's doctrine of the "double decree of God," or the opposite doctrine of universalism. Neither the one nor the other is in accordance with the teaching of the Bible. There is no "double decree," but only the one which is revealed in Christ. There is, however, also no soothing doctrine of universalism, because there is a sphere which lies outside of Christ—abiding under the wrath of God.[34]

Indeed, the aim is laudable, but the avoidance of both a double decree and universalism is hardly solved by positing a sphere in God which is different from his revelation.

Brunner's difficulty lies in the ambiguity between the knowledge of God in general and special revelation, i.e. knowledge of God apart from Christ and knowledge in Christ. For him, the created order hides and reveals God. It hides him from man as he actually is, that is, as a God who wills community with man. According to Brunner's interpretation of Romans 1:17, it reveals him as a God of wrath, who convicts man as one without excuse. Difficulty emerges because Brunner cannot decide if general

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

revelation is the distorted expression of what is not really God's essence, or if it reflects the nature of God himself, a nature which from one perspective may be as significant as revelation in Christ.

The difficulty is inevitable because Brunner cannot accept that God's wrath is expressed in Christ. For him this is contrary to the Bible.[35] Instead, he insists that the dialectic of love and wrath must be maintained. Nevertheless, he calls the dialectic into question by positing a double sphere in the nature of God. This is counter to his original intention. Nevertheless, Brunner has clearly shown that a genuine doctrine of revelation involves the concept of hiddenness as its correlate. Revelation is the miracle of God and his plan for the world involves community with him; but thereby his mystery is not erased, even for the believer.

4. *Philosophical categories and the doctrine of God*

There is considerable vacillation in Brunner's estimate of the positive or negative influence of philosophical categories upon theological understanding. Generally, however, one can say that Brunner shares with the Ritschlians the assumption that metaphysical categories are antithetical to a proper Christian analysis. The insistence upon the dialectic of wrath and love, of course, divides his understanding of revelation from the Ritschlians.

The difficulties which Luther had with the problem of predestination, as noted previously, Brunner attributes to his involvement in scholastic categories. A similar difficulty was pointed out in his understanding of God's omnipotence. Brunner generally adds that Luther had difficulty because he was under the sway of the scholastic distinction between the *potestas absolutas* and the *potestas ordinatas,* as well as under the notion that God is *esse.*[36] Consequently, he never asks himself the question why a

[35] *Ibid.,* p. 234.

[36] Brunner, *Dogmatik,* Vol. I, p. 266.

particular writer, for example, used the word "absolute," whether or not here is something which can be utilized within the framework of Christian theology.

It is always the other way around. Christian theology has unfortunately borrowed from the Greeks and the thing which plagues Christian theology is—and here Brunner quotes Ritschl—the "Hellenization of Christian thought." [37] Consequently, much of Christian thought is static, because it is unfortunately mixed with "being." The Christological controversies themselves had too much speculation of this nature, and the word "substance" is too Greek.[38] The problem of the attributes of God has been plagued by the infiltration of Greek modes of thinking into Christian theology, from the patristic period to the late middle ages. Even Luther was not completely free of it, and Protestant orthodoxy relapsed into this difficulty. That is why Brunner feels that Ritschl, A. Harnack, and Loofs were correct in their historical work, even though their own understanding of Christianity was unfortunately still under the spell of the Enlightenment.

In Brunner we have the phenomenon of an understanding of Christianity which cuts through all philosophical considerations in the realm of theology, but still sets itself against the "ethical metaphysic" of Ritschl. In the rigorous attempt to maintain the

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 258; Also *God and Man*, p. 38.

[38] Brunner, *Dogmatik*, p. 254. Compare this statement with an earlier one in *The Mediator*, where Brunner contends that such an accusation on the part of the Ritschlians was due to a complete misunderstanding of the significance of the Christological controversies and of the meaning of the word "substance." (See Chapter VIII and p. 213, of *The Mediator*. In the same book, he does not object to the term *exlex* used by Luther (footnote p. 473). But in the *Dogmatik*, Brunner consistently praises the Ritschlian historians. This is interesting in the light of the fact that the original break with the Ritschlian movement, as we saw in chapter two above, came from historians and not on the theological level. Brunner along with Barth broke on the theological, but now it appears that Brunner is swinging back to the Ritschlian line in his historical judgments. His extremely anti-Greek feeling and his suggestions concerning the speculation of Luther in conjunction with the scholastics support this change.

integrity of theology on the basis of the incarnation, all philosophical-theological movements are caricatured to such an extent that one wonders, if one followed the logic of Brunner, how philosophers could ever have been so naive.

Brunner's book, *Revelation and Reason,* is the only exception to this attitude. In it he tries, on the basis of the Christian revelation, to relate himself to the philosophical enterprise. However, the book itself is inconsistent,[39] and in the first volume of the *Dogmatics* the attempt at correlation has evidently been abandoned.

What this means for the problem of the hidden God is that the attempts to come to an understanding of the hidden God discussed in chapters two and three above (with the possible exception of minor phases of the thought of chapter two), are in no way related to the hidden God whom Brunner knows apart from and in Christ. The one exception to this general note is that, though Rudolf Otto is consistently repudiated in the earlier works of Brunner,[40] the concept of the wholly other is used in the *Dogmatics* within a Christian framework. But here also he is against the irrational numinous, and against the *via negationis* and the *via eminentiae* because they are alien to Christian theology.[41] This insistence upon the purity of theology, unadulterated by philosophical considerations, has its logical end in that Brunner sets himself against what he calls abstraction and speculation simply because it happens to be philosophical rather than theological. As a result, there is no more wrestling with the thought of the ages, whether positive or negative, in respect to the Christian revelation. There is only its forthright rebuttal and therefore a lack of appreciation of its life. If Brunner is right, neither philosophy nor theology was really alive except in brief spans of its history. Brunner believes in blanket con-

[39] See my review in *Christianity and Society,* Winter, 1946.

[40] For example, Brunner, *The Mediator,* p. 293.

[41] Brunner, *Dogmatik,* Vol. I, pp. 260, 261.

demnation of the Greeks and the scholastics, just as Ritschl did. But his understanding of hiddenness and revelation decisively differentiates his viewpoint from that of Ritschl.

B. REVELATION AND HIDDENNESS[42]

1. *Revelation defines hiddenness*

The key to Karl Barth's theology lies in his insistence that God is known only through Jesus Christ. He is the most consistent Christological thinker in the history of theology. Revelation is the one and only starting point for theological thinking, and it is the only concern which theology can have at its center. Inasmuch as one starts with the revelation in Christ as the only normative clue to the understanding of the reality and meaning of God, the problem of natural theology is eliminated.

If natural theology were possible, suggests Barth, its content would be wrath.[43] In principle Barth concedes what Brunner declares God's nature to be apart from the reception of Christ;

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[42] Karl Barth, unlike most of the men considered in this exposition, is not concerned to bring Luther's views on hiddenness into line with his own. Barth's thought is independent, in the sense that Barth always looks to the Bible and secondly to the history of theology as the basis for his theological exposition. It is really because Barth finds the Reformers closer to the Bible than most of the history of Christian thought that he quotes them so often. They are not significant because they are the Reformers. Barth can as easily quote from Aquinas as from the Reformers, provided on the basis of his understanding of the Bible he is also able to learn from Aquinas. From the same basis, he can suggest the difficulties of the formulations of both Luther and Aquinas. Barth's utilization of the history of theology, therefore, must always be seen from the perspective of his independence, but at the same time from his willingness to learn from those who through the ages have also tried to expound the nature and implications of the faith which speaks from the pages of the Bible. For our purposes, this means that a different methodological procedure is here necessary. Instead of giving a delineation of Barth's view of Luther at the outset, it is necessary first of all to indicate Barth's own views, since they are the basis from which he looks at Luther. Perhaps this is what all of the previous men have done in some sense. Nevertheless, they have tried to proceed on the basis of their understanding of Luther. Barth consciously and methodologically reverses the procedure.

[43] Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 190.

but he denies that it has any reality. This means further that general revelation is for Barth a kind of natural theology. God's relation to creation, for example, is known because God's sovereignty has been disclosed in Christ. It is because one starts here that one can and must affirm God's relation to the creation and the created order. One cannot take the created order into account in itself, as Brunner does.

The serious nature of this insistence is apparent in that Barth now rejects similar views expressed in his *Epistle to the Romans.*[44] In it he interpreted Romans 1:18-21 to mean that the invisible things of God seen from creation are his everlasting power and divinity. Here wrath and hiddenness have a similar place as in the thought of Brunner, however different the nuances. In the *Dogmatik* this is changed. Here, Romans 1:18ff. is not to be seen as a general truth, or in an anthropological sense. Such approaches take what Paul has written out of the context of the total epistle, argues Barth. He suggests that the Jews and pagans to whom Paul was addressing these words were those who were confronted by the gospel *first* and foremost. It is the gospel which throws this shadowy side upon their recalcitrance. Hence, there is no separate revelation. It is the message of Christ itself which has this side, and not some knowledge of God apart from Christ.[45] Here, then, hiddenness or wrath, or both in conjunction, are repudiated for not having validity apart from the revelation in Christ.

In bringing these rather debatable verses from Romans into

[44] Barth, *Epistle to the Romans,* pp. 45-47. Barth's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans will not ordinarily be utilized. This is only fair, since what Barth has to say has been said more fully and in the way in which he would want it said, in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik.* Although some of the other works, such as *Credo* and *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God,* stand closer to the *Dogmatik* than to this exposition of Romans, they are not used because of the comprehensive and definitive nature of the *Dogmatik.* At the moment of writing, a plan to translate all of Barth's *Dogmatik* has been announced.

[45] For Barth's exposition of this understanding, see *Kirchliche Dogmatik,* Vol. II, part 1, pp. 131-6.

the context of revelation, Barth demonstrates the important character of his Christological thinking, whatever the verdict may be, for his exegesis. The problem of God's hiddenness is exclusively a problem of revelation. Although one may want to say that God remains hidden until he reveals himself, even this cannot be the first word. If it were, then one would be back in the realm of some general knowledge concerning God. It is rather that revelation defines God as the hidden God. Because one knows God revealed in Christ, one knows that he is a hidden God.

The rationale for this affirmation is simply that God's essence is known through grace and nowhere else. Further, grace is manifested only in Christ. Therefore to know what God is, is to know him in Christ. To know God in any other way is not to know God but to make an idolatrous creation of one's own. To discover God in this way is to know that he cannot be found anywhere else. This is why revelation defines God as the hidden God. Hiddenness is the first point in revelation, not the last.[46] The knowledge of God in Christ and God's hiddenness as its consequence is the *terminus a quo* (point from which) for theological thinking. It may also be the *terminus ad quem* (point to which), but in theology one must be clear that one starts, not only ends, with this point. Hiddenness is therefore necessarily established through revelation.[47]

God can only be known through God. One can start nowhere else. Momentarily leaving aside the conceptual problem, this means that God and his disclosure of himself is of a different order than any subject which one can know, whether directly or indirectly, whether physically or spiritually. Knowledge of God is different, therefore, from all other possibilities, exactly because its subject is different from all other subjects. The

[46] Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, pp. 205f.
[47] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, part 2, p. 33.

difference is not one of degree, but of an order of knowledge.[48]

Consistent with Barth's premise, one must say that man cannot declare God to be of a different order. One cannot even declare God or God's word to be *sui generis*. One cannot declare as such that God is a Subject not to be compared with other subjects. If one could do this, one would already be setting the limits. It is God in his revelation who sets the limits, and who makes it known that he is really different, that he is the wholly other. If one could, for example, declare God the wholly other, apart from his communication which defines it, one would deny genuine otherness because it would be man's expression which defines the boundaries of God and man.[49] This would be man's last word about himself.

Barth does not deny the conceptual problem. This is assumed in the knowledge of revelation. But it is not the starting point, and therefore not the initial problem. Because God's hiddenness is evident only on the basis of revelation, one should not begin with the impossibility of knowing God and of the difficulty of the conceptual problem, but rather with a word of thankfulness that God has spoken and that one now knows him.[50] The actuality of revelation in Jesus Christ means that God is free and open for man where he was not free and open before. It is this which makes God hidden, for God is not free for man to reach and grasp him, except as he has reached down in Christ. But this one knows again from the standpoint of revelation, for "in this Cosmos, God is . . . hidden and man is blind. . . . It is God's revelation which gives him this knowledge."[51] But since it is revelation which now takes man's blindness away, his first word ought to be thankfulness, inasmuch as revelation has shown how deeply God was hidden.

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[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, part 2, pp. 187-88.
[49] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pp. 186-87.
[50] Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 215.
[51] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, part 2, p. 33.

Hiddenness as the correlate of revelation in the manner just delineated makes it necessary for Barth to differentiate his analysis from many of the notions of hiddenness found in the history of thought and philosophy. Barth maintains therefore that this view of hiddenness is not the same as the Platonic or Kantian view in which the highest essence is beyond man's capacity of truth and past the understanding of his reason. This in fact, he says, it may be also; but revelation will have to convince man on the basis of its truth. Nor is hiddenness in any way related to man's general reflections on space and time, on the nature of his categories, or on the *a priori* in his reflections.[52] This again may be a problem, but it is not the problem of hiddenness. As a matter of fact, it is interesting to note that although Barth rejects Otto's *Idea of the Holy* in that it has no identity with the Word of God,[53] he does not categorically reject the term *a priori,* except where it is connected with man's reflection. Barth rejects it because in the history of theology and philosophy it has carried the connotation of a capacity or a qualification grounded in the nature of man.[54] It seems logical to assume that Barth could accept the concept of *a priori,* just as he has the concept *sui generis,* provided it is grounded on God's differentiation, and not in man's capacity.

It is perhaps superfluous to state that this view of hiddenness has no connection with the hiddenness of the spiritual as over against the material or objective, or that of the relative hiddenness of past events, or of the absolute hiddenness of the unseen Creator either for man's earthly or spiritual eyes.[55] Nor is it related to the absolute or unconditioned, which is a definition from the side of man. Further, it is not to be understood as resignation before the God whom one cannot understand, since hid-

[52] *Ibid.,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 206.
[53] Barth, *Doctrine of the Word of God,* p. 153. Also *Dogmatik,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 405.
[54] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God,* p. 220.
[55] Barth, *Dogmatik,* Vol. I, part 2, p. 68.

denness is connected with the God whom one does understand.[56]

But Barth wishes to clarify, not to reject, the meaning of *deus definiri nequit* (God cannot be defined). It does not mean that in order to give adequate expression to the substance of God all expressions must be in negative form, as in the *"kataphatishe"* theology. Nor does it mean that negative concepts, in the sense of Dionysius the Areopagite and his followers, are proper, as if negative concepts were any less incapable than positive ones to express the nature of God. Simply from this point of view, suggests Barth, Dionysius was not yet sufficiently radical. At the same time, the impossibility of concepts for defining God ought not lead to the pietist conclusion, in the sense of Schleiermacher's "absolute dependence," any more than it ought to lead to the conclusion of mystical theology.[57]

For Barth, the *deus definiri nequit* has a meaning on the basis of revelation and hiddenness. Man must give up his capacities and concepts as the possibility of knowing God, and must start with the revelation of God, in which no concepts are adequate but in which God utilizes man's concepts for meaning and for proclamation. There are no concepts or words, suggests Barth, which do not stand under the problem of hiddenness. This is even true of the biblical words, contrary to the notion of orthodoxy. Nor is one to think that somehow revelation changes words or concepts to make them meaningful. Rather the connection between revelation and hiddenness is that words and concepts, which as such are not pictures of God, become signs and pictures of God.[58] When one knows Jesus Christ, declares Barth, one does not know conceptually what one really says. Here hiddenness divides what one has received and what one tries to express. Although what one has received is not identical with one's concepts, one nevertheless must speak in and through

[56] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 215.
[57] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 217.
[58] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 218.

them. This makes theology a dangerous and continuously necessary task. Unless on the basis of God's revelation man could speak, all would be lost. But if on the basis of his concepts, namely himself,[59] he had to speak, all would equally be lost. But that, on the basis of God's revelation, man may and must speak—this it is which makes theology so dangerous and exciting a task.

Since theology, for Barth, must have its starting point in God's revelation and God's hiddenness in the manner indicated, it is evident again why he finds all suggestions concerning a natural knowledge of God, or a point of contact, fundamentally uninteresting. If man has knowledge of God, God has already spoken to him. Barth therefore wishes to start from that point. In this context a point of contact is not denied, provided it is not assumed along with revelation as its presupposition. It is not something which man brings. Actually, man's concepts, including his being man, are a problem even when revelation has occurred. It is rather, for Barth, that the point of contact is established in a quite new way through revelation.

2. *Veiling and unveiling*

Revelation establishes how hidden God is. On the basis of revelation, it is necessary to ask in what way God is knowable and to what extent. As in the case of Brunner, it must be said that God is not known directly. Barth declares that Luther was right in asserting that a direct knowledge of God would be tantamount to insisting upon works rather than upon faith.[60] Only a second God could see God directly.[61] In revelation one has indirect though genuine knowledge of God.

One must be careful, however, in using the word "indirect," since it connotes seeing God behind or through the world. Therefore, Barth discards it in favor of "form" and "content,"

[59] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 204.
[60] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 193.
[61] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 19.

or of what he still more frequently calls "veiling" (*Verhüllung*) and "unveiling" (*Enthüllung*). It is the veiling of God which cuts away the ground from any spiritual understanding of God that could be derived from the term "indirectness." Veiling means that God comes where he is not really expected. He comes where any spiritual interpretation as such is impossible, because he comes in the concreteness of flesh, or into the world of sin. Here "the being given to see" God through the veil is an "in spite of." [62] This does not mean that Barth is concerned to drive a wedge which excludes all analogy. Analogy is possible precisely because God became man. But because God veils himself in the flesh in order to unveil himself, no *analogia entis* (analogy of being) is possible. If God did not veil himself, he would smash into man's world. Or man, in order to apprehend him, would have to be taken out of this world. And only on such a basis could the *analogia entis* be possible.[63] Analogy, like man's concepts, is a way of speaking about God on the basis of the prior reality of revelation, but it is always limited by God's veiling.

God's veiling in Christ, or in the flesh, does not imply that revelation is something which is veiled and then will be unveiled. It also includes God's unveiling in his veiling. These two statements, which on the surface may appear to be the same, are both necessary for Barth's analysis of the nature of revelation, particularly in its relation to faith.

Although Barth expounds what he means by God's being veiled in his unveiling, he illustrates by quoting extensively from a sermon of Luther's on the Canaanitish woman in Matthew 15. According to the sermon, this woman declares her faith in pleas for mercy, but our Lord is silent. Still the woman trusts that he is merciful though he seems harsh in not answering. When, at the entreaty of the disciples, our Lord stresses that he is sent

[62] Barth, *Doctrine of the Word of God,* p. 190.
[63] Barth, *Dogmatik,* Vol. I, part 2, pp. 38-41.

only to the house of Israel, she still does not give up, trusting that his mercy is surely still to be found underneath all this. Entreating once more for help, she receives the reply that bread is not to be taken from the children and given to dogs. Thereupon she does not stop but willingly admits that she is a dog, namely, among the damned and lost. On this basis she insists that even the dogs receive the crumbs which fall from the table. And thereupon the Lord opens himself, and declares that she is not a dog now, but really a child of God.[64]

Here God is not only veiled to thought but veiled in his activity. Yet in this activity, in this saying "no," the woman finds a "yes," which is the very unveiling of God. Barth feels that it takes exactly this kind of persistence or trust, for God's veiling, i.e. his "no," to become a veritable unveiling or "yes." Here there is neither direct nor indirect knowledge, but a discovery of the mercy of God in a veiling or form which appears quite contrary to its content. But this is exactly the lot of man, that in this kind of form he must find the proper content. This in itself is an act of God's mercy, or the impartation of faith.

Exactly here God's veiling in his unveiling must again become and be an unveiling which is recognized as veiling. Were this not true, man would stand before God in the consummation of his relation with God. Then faith would be sight. In the recognition that God's veiling in his unveiling is also an unveiling in veiling, one returns again to the place of the believer. It makes it impossible that he who has experienced God's mercy can now claim to *have* that mercy. He must rather start all over again, standing before God's veiling in his unveiling, exactly because in a previous moment he had discovered that this implied an unveiling in veiling. It means, in fact, that the believer in the moment of revelation is plunged before the hidden God, to begin all over again.[65] It is this which divides faith from the

[64] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God,* pp. 202-3.
[65] *Ibid.,* p. 204.

mystic vision, in which the veiling in unveiling remains an unveiling which now is clear but can only inadequately be expressed by symbols. In mysticism one does not stand at the juncture of revelation and hiddenness, or the relation of veiling in unveiling and unveiling in veiling, which is characteristic of faith. Faith is rather

> . . . the recognition of our limits and the recognition of the mystery of the Word of God, the recognition that our hearing is bound to God himself who wills to lead us now through form to content, and now through content back to form, and in both cases to himself, who one way or the other does not give himself into our hands, but keeps us in his hand.[66]

It is necessary, however, to inquire more carefully into what Barth means by form and content, veiling and unveiling in their relations to each other. It is not that they can simply be put together in the form of a synthesis or in some symmetrical relation. Nor can they be taken simply as the two sides of God's will or of man's comprehension. Here rather is involved the kind of "along with each other" and "in each other" which may be said to be dialectical; but it is dialectical in the sense of being ordered by God's purpose for man. Barth graphically depicts this in a passage in which he excludes certain possible relations of veiling and unveiling and shows at the same time what he means.

> In . . . veiling and unveiling . . . we are not concerned with quantities, whether viewed from the side of God or man; in both cases we are concerned with the one entire God and with the one total man. After that is clear, we shall remind ourselves: between veiling and unveiling there is no symmetrical relation; in its own direction no ambiguous, fluctuating, unclear relation, no caprice, whether of God or man, resulting from revulsion or sudden change. But if one wishes to characterize the relation of these two concepts and with that the explanation of the concept of analogy as dialectical, then one must note under all circumstances: we are concerned with an orderly and indeed a

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

teleologically ordered dialectic. With both concepts we refer to the grace of God's revelation. For God is gracious not only in his unveiling, but also in his veiling, not only in his forgiving and sanctifying "yes," but also in his "no" of judgment in regard to our work. And only because of his unveiling does he veil himself; only because of his "yes," must he also say "no." Unveiling and veiling therefore characterize God's way with us, not a contradiction which he inflicts upon us and into which he plunges us, and which we as such have to suffer or endure. On this path, from beginning to end, one healing consummation of community between him and us is at stake here. In the consummation of this community he must become hidden to us, in order to be manifest to us; he must become revealed and nevertheless remain hidden, whereby the manifestation, the "yes" which he says to us, however hidden it still may be underneath the "no," is the aim, and end of his way.[67]

Veiling and unveiling is then the way in which God makes himself known to man. Concretely this means that God has been comprehended in Christ, but that his hiddenness is not lifted.[68] Thus hiddenness and revelation are also seen to be the *terminus ad quem* of the theological endeavor. Between the recognition of revelation and hiddenness as the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* stands the apprehension of God in his veiling and unveiling. Revelation and hiddenness in this sense define the point of departure, the process of God's communication (veiling in unveiling) and the present state of waiting again for God's communication, since he cannot be possessed in his unveiling in veiling.

3. *Hiddenness in Christ*

Having shown the hiddenness of God at the beginning and end of the theological enterprise, and having indicated the form of revelation, it is now necessary to examine Barth's understand-

[67] Barth, *Dogmatik,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 266. A similar exposition is found in Vol. II, part 1, p. 242.

[68] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, pp. 223, 24.

ing of the problem of God's hiddenness in Christ.[69]

This necessitates an understanding of God's disclosure in the Old Testament. Although Barth starts with a Christological understanding, he neither neglects the Old Testament nor does he see Christ on every page of the Old Testament, as popular interpretations of Barth imply. The Old Testament, seen from the standpoint of the New, is the "awaiting revelation." It manifests the sovereign freedom of God's act in the world. It is surrounded on every side by God's hiddenness. Also here God reveals himself in hiddenness and shows himself hidden in revelation.[70] God's speaking to Moses and the prophets has this double character. It is further expressed in a total word of judgment and a total word of forgiveness, usually to the same people, though not at the same time. It must be clear, however, that for Barth all this means that God is already gracious, however hidden he may be or however holy and judging he is. God's calling of Israel is the first act of mercy, from which even God's judgment must be seen as a work of love. Here veiling and unveiling are both signs of grace.

God is, of course, especially hidden to Israel, the chosen one. God in his activity is unsearchable, as in the cry of Job. Why life is so difficult for the chosen is a continual cry of lament. Why the people are so sinful, necessitating that God speak his judgment, is equally perplexing.[71] To see either of these problems, or both, under the grace of God became increasingly impossible. Either one, and sometimes both, defines the situation for which the Old Testament awaited an answer.

As if God were not hidden enough, he became hidden in

[69] Barth does not separate these elements since revelation and hiddenness, veiling and unveiling, hiddenness and Christ, all belong together. They are separated here for the sake of exposition and in what is hoped some logical order.

[70] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. I, part 2, p. 93. It is true that in Vol. III, parts 1 and 2, Barth is dangerously close to seeing the Christological in the Old Testament. This is the material on creation.

[71] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. I, part 2, p. 121.

Christ exactly to answer this question through an event which enacted the nature of the problem. The Son of man suffered and was rejected by the world. He came in the form of flesh into a corrupt world, and was crucified by the elect. In this path, God enacts the problem of the Old Testament as the basis for his disclosure. This hides God still more and makes the problem of hiddenness in the Old Testament insignificant by comparison.[72] It is the really hidden, that which is dark, which becomes light.

From the standpoint of the suffering of Christ, it is evident that the question of why life does not go well for the elect is cast aside. It is to ask why Christ, who is innocent, must suffer? The greater hiddenness makes the lesser hiddenness superfluous. For Barth, Job's is no longer the question from the perspective of the New Testament.

The problem of man's evil is not thrust aside, but taken in all its seriousness. Christ takes upon himself the wrath of God against man, which man of himself could not stand. To understand wrath, then, one does not look at God apart from Christ, but at what is signified in Christ. God's righteousness is made manifest in Good Friday, where God takes upon himself the consequence of man's disobedience, and where this righteousness is transformed into the compassion of Easter. In this combination of righteousness and compassion is manifested God's majesty and omnipotence. And that God's majesty and man's misery should meet here is the ungraspable fact which points to the hidden character of the unrevealed God.[73]

From this perspective, the wrath of God is established in Christ. It is God's grace, not God apart from grace, which becomes judgment. But it is also only the man who stands in grace who dares see what it means that God stands against

[72] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, part 2, p. 122.

[73] Barth's full discussion of this problem can be found in *Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, pp. 401-8, 441-50.

man.[74] Law and gospel, form and content, veiling and unveiling, wrath and mercy are directly related to God's revelation—one does not merely pass from one to the other. God's revelation establishes form and veil, law and wrath. It is fully established as the "no" which may yet be God's "yes," but without taking the "no" away.

God's wrath and judgment is only the hard shell, the *opus alienum* of God's grace, but it is the man who knows about grace, about the *opus dei proprium*, who alone knows what God's wrath and judgment are.[75]

Wrath, therefore, belongs to the hiddenness of God in Christ, and not to God whom one might fear apart from Christ, as in Brunner or as in certain passages of Luther. Barth wishes it to be clear, however, that Luther was not altogether consistent at this point. There are also passages in which Luther saw God's wrath manifested in Christ, as in the events of Good Friday when love and judgment belong together. The holiness of God, therefore, suggests Barth, means the oneness of judgment and grace—that his grace is judgment, and his judgment, grace.[76]

For the Christian life this means the proper fear of God. This fear, however, is not based on God in himself, but upon God's mercy or love. Man does not stand before God and fear, but fears God because he has declared his love to man and man dares love him. It is because of God's grace or love that man knows that he has responsibilities, responsibilities even to love only him. Fear in this context reminds man that God's grace and love are imparted to him, and therefore love will be kept in its proper context. Fear is the proper response to the togetherness of judgment or wrath, and grace.[77] It means that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, but that Christians cannot avoid this.

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[74] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 407.
[75] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 205.
[76] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 408.
[77] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, pp. 37f., 406f.

In summary, then, it may be said that Barth thinks that God manifested his deepest hiddenness in the events of the cross, which hide God at the very point at which the Old Testament is trying to emerge from obscurity. Further, in the cross one sees the deep meaning of God's wrath expressing itself in grace, and his grace in wrath.

4. *The mystery of God in his freedom*[78]

As we have indicated again and again, Barth categorically insists that God's revelation in Christ is the only normative point for theological thinking in the church. But if this is both the norm and foundation, it does not mean that structurally Barth starts his *Dogmatics* at this point. Barth starts rather with the Trinity and the doctrine of God. While it is true that most dogmatics in the history of thought start with the doctrine of God, it is not true that most of them start with the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet, on the basis of Barth's insistence upon the Christological, one would expect him to start here.

The history of theology and the difficulties encountered when theology starts with the doctrine of God shed light on Barth's problem. The early theologians used the distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us." On this basis, they spoke of the fact that God is, either by presupposition or by proofs for the existence of God, or by both. Having established this, they elaborated the attributes of God on the basis of what God must be like to be God. Then they proceeded to elaborate God's being "for us" on the basis of his revelation in Christ. For Barth, this is not correct, since the first possibility must be grounded on the second, or it is not genuinely based on revelation.

The Ritschlian movement likewise started with the doctrine of God. It abolished the distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us," however, on the basis that there can be no distinc-

[78] Barth does not often directly make this identification, though it is always implied. For direct identification, see *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, pp. 354, 386.

tion between God's being and God's act. What God is, is revealed first and only through Christ. Because he believed that Christ reveals what God is like, instead of that God is really revealed in Christ, Ritschl started with the doctrine of God.

In spite of both types of difficulties, Barth structurally could not start with Christology. This he could not do because it meant saying that God is love without indicating the freedom of God in his love. It would have made God's disclosure of himself into a *proposition* rather than into an act. In fact, it would have meant the inversion of Ritschl's thought.

Barth, against the Ritschlians, insists upon the distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us." Admitting that the starting point is "God for us," that is, the event wherein one is brought into a relationship with God and whereupon one may think in trinitarian form, Barth nevertheless insists upon the freedom of God who stands behind this disclosure and of whom therefore one must talk on the basis of his communication of himself. Along with the older theology Barth accepts the distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us," since it is the basis for speaking about God from the standpoint of his communication, and at the same time indicates his freedom in that communication. It makes it possible to speak of God's love in himself and in like manner of the Trinity, though on the basis of his disclosure.

> The only sound . . . procedure left is to distinguish deliberately and sharply, as does the entire older theology, between his immanent Trinity and the Trinity of God as knowable by us in the revealed, written, and proclaimed Word of God, i.e. between "God in himself" and "God for us," between the "eternal history of God" and his action in time, to remember continually how "God for us" does not self-evidently stand out from the background of "God in himself," how it is true not as a condition of God which we could fix and assert by starting from the concept of man as participating in his revelation, but as an act, a step which God makes to meet man, by which the latter first becomes a man participating in his revelation. This becom-

ing on man's part is one that is conditioned from without, from God's side, whereas God by making the step by which the whole correlation is first created at all, is not conditioned from without, from man's side. . . . In theology, as actually in the proper doctrine of the Trinity as the presupposition of Christology, we must speak of God in himself, in his isolation over against man. The only way we know ourselves is as those addressed by God's word, but, of course, just because we are those addressed by God's word, we should naturally have to know God as him who addresses us in freedom as the Lord, who does not exist merely in addressing us, but as him who is the cause and truth of this relation and correlation, who is also God in himself, also God in his eternal history.[79]

The distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us," therefore makes it impossible to say as a matter of starting point that God is love, because it emphasizes the free act of God behind and in the love revealed in Christ. But Barth does not utilize the distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us" in the traditional manner of first speaking about God and then about God in Christ. One can only speak about "God in himself" on the basis of "God for us," but the distinction is necessary exactly because of the freedom of God whereby he speaks to man.

Barth starts with the doctrine of the Trinity because it gives the possibility of speaking about "God in himself" on the basis of "God for us." The immanent Trinity can be translated into the actual Trinity, not only at the point of revelation, but also in God himself. It makes possible the necessary distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us," without their separation. It states the oneness of "God in himself" with "God for us," and also the freedom of God.

In Barth's thought God is not considered to be different from

[79] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God,* pp. 196-97. The original reads "distinguish between the Trinity of God as knowable by us in the revealed, written, and proclaimed word of God and his immanent Trinity." I have inverted this order in the quotation, since it is obviously an unintentional mistake which needs correction to keep the parallelism.

his manifestation.[80] But what he is must be distinguished from his operation, because on it rests his being God.[81] That God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or that the biblical notion of revelation must be defined in this way, means that one can and must speak of God himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If God's love is communicated for man in this trinitarian context, it must also be true of him apart from man, if he is really God in freedom and love. God is love quite apart from man, or from creation, or from his revelation of himself to man as love. This can, of course, be said only on the basis of that revelation. This manifest love must emanate from God himself who is love.[82]

That God is love apart from the created world is evident when, on the basis of his revelation, one can and must declare that the trinitarian character of revelation reflects that which he is. In himself, God is love in the eternal generation of the Son. The God who meets man as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is already the God who meets himself and has community in this way. The God who wills community for man, already has community because of his trinitarian nature.[83] Therefore, his will for community, that he did not wish to be alone, cannot be given as the ground for God's disclosure. God is already community and wishes it for man. And it should be noted that God does not love man for the sake of community, but rather because of his will of love.[84]

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[80] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 305. Also the *Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 349.

[81] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 426.

[82] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pp. 158-59; 555. Also *Dogmatik*, Vol. I, part 2, p. 415.

[83] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 307.

[84] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 313. This is a necessary but subtle distinction. Although Barth does not mention Brunner, it could be an attack upon him, since in Brunner's thought the will to community is given as God's freedom but is not grounded in the God who is himself community, and who therefore really out of freedom wills it. For Brunner it is rather God's nature to will community, while for Barth it stems out of God's

On the basis of this trinitarian formulation, similar statements can be made of the Christological element, though the Christological is the presupposition of the trinitarian. Christ is the revelation of God, but Christ is also antecedently in himself already Christ, just as God in himself is to be distinguished but not separated from "God for us." [85] Here the Christological understanding is sharply differentiated from any Ritschlian understanding.

The fact that we know God rests finally upon his freedom. The expression of his love is the expression of his freedom, in which he makes known to man what he essentially is. But it is also this freedom which constitutes the hiddenness of God in the sense of his inconceivability and mystery. In his revelation, God does not give himself to man to possess. In his operation he reveals what he actually is, but one cannot get hold of his essence.

> On this freedom of his rests the distinction between the essence of God as such and his essence as the Operator, the Self-manifesting. On this freedom rests the inconceivability of God, the inadequacy of all knowledge of God.[86]

This means that one will never know God as "I," but always as "thou" or "he." One will never know God as he knows himself or man, or as one man knows another.

Here the freedom of God means his separation from man, his essential mystery which is still hiddenness. This is why Barth says that the hiddenness of God is the ungraspableness of the the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, known essentially only to God himself, though he has also given himself to be known in this form. Here man is before the hidden mystery of God's being, in which God as he is known to himself and as he is known to

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ungrounded freedom, that he is community out of himself, but not out of nature as such. This defends the freedom of God, who is as he manifests himself, but who is that in the freedom of his own being.

[85] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pp. 476-82, 545.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 426.

man in revelation are to be distinguished but not separated. It is God in himself which defines hiddenness as God's mystery when distinguished heuristically, not constitutively, from "God for us." [87]

When the mystery of God is defined in this way, there can be no hidden God who stays behind in revelation. The Triune God who speaks from out of his mystery is not different from the God who speaks. There can be no other God behind this God. No hidden essence remains behind what God does. Although God is a hidden mystery behind his revelation and remains mystery because of his essential freedom, there is no God to be feared, or no terrible or naked God behind his revelation. No untrustworthy God remains behind revelation.[88]

In Luther, states Barth, it often appears that another God stands behind, or remains behind God's revelation.[89] But this is not considered to be Luther's primary emphasis. Rather, it is said to be the veiling of God because of his essential mystery. Barth thus calls attention to Luther's problem, but he finds the main line to be centered in the identity of God and revelation, particularly since his distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us" is not one of speculation but rather one of the indirectness of all knowledge of God.[90]

The hiddenness of God in this respect is the freedom of God's mystery from out of which he speaks and in which he remains, though he manifests his nature as love. God's freedom and love define his nature and his act, as alike freedom and love. Such thinking, Barth admits, is tautological, but there is no other way when dealing with the incomprehensible God who speaks—and who speaks out of his own being.

Whatever may be said of God must therefore be said from the

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[87] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 389.
[88] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, pp. 236-37.
[89] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 237.
[90] Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 197.

perspective of the double character of freedom and love. God's attributes must also be seen in this context. This is why Barth arranges them in pairs, so that freedom and love are always connected. The first group defines God as love, but qualifies that love by freedom, so that it is God's freedom which distinguishes God's love from all other love. God's grace is qualified by holiness, his mercy by righteousness, and his humility by wisdom. The second group defines God's freedom. Here his oneness, that all comes from himself, is qualified by his presence, that is, his love. His permanence is qualified by his omnipotence, that is, the victory of his love. His eternity in turn is qualified by his being our Lord.

It is not necessary here to discuss all the attributes as Barth elaborates them. The important thing is to see that the nature of God as love and the freedom of that love are connected in each case. In the case of God's grace, for example, this means that God really is grace and that no other character may be ascribed to God. There can be no other hidden element. At the same time, grace is different from all other grace exactly because God's holiness signifies the freedom of God which differentiates his grace from all other grace. It discloses its mystery and essential hiddenness in spite of its meaning. In man's knowledge, therefore, God is not grace as clearly as God understands himself to be, but he is nevertheless grace. Conversely, however, this also means that God's holiness cannot be separated from his grace. God's holiness must be defined in terms of his love, or his holiness could be awe and fear, as Otto thought—or as sheer majesty apart from love, as Luther at times expressed it.[91]

When Barth defines his second group of attributes as mercy and righteousness, one could ask whether the same thing is not said of grace and holiness. To this Barth agrees, stating that each set of attributes says the same thing, only in a different way, and therefore in a way which illuminates more fully what is

[91] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Vol. II, part 1, pp. 402-7.

always the same. Here, also, as in the former set of attributes, Barth indicates that this way of posing the relation makes it necessary to exclude Luther's occasional view that righteousness is defined apart from mercy. It also excludes Ritschl's interpretation that righteousness and mercy are simply identified instead of qualified in terms of the freedom and love of God.[92] In the identification, Ritschl lost both righteousness and love.

In these examples, sufficient indication has been given of the way in which Barth connects the freedom of God (God in himself) and the love of God (God for us). This way preserves the mystery of God in spite of his revelation (cutting the ground from under Ritschlian thought), and at the same time affirms the essential oneness of the two in a way which leaves no room for the type of mystery which is unrelated to his love (as in the case of Luther and Brunner).

All that has been said in this section is succinctly given by Barth in a section of the *Dogmatik* in which he summarizes the various elements.

> In a doctrine of God's attributes . . . we must especially insist upon . . . God's unveiling and his veiling. This oneness and differentiation coincides with the oneness and the differentiation in God's essence, between his love and his freedom. In that God loves us, he is, in that . . . he himself is also the loving one, fully knowable. In that God loves us in his freedom, in that . . . he is also the free one, he is for us fully unknowable. Precisely in the grace of his revelation both things are true. He loves us and he does so in freedom. If his revelation is his truth, then he is in reality the same both in oneness and difference, then he is the loving one in freedom. Then this is his essence, that he is both, not in his separateness but in his unity, but again not in the cancellation of differentiation, but in the differentiation of this twofoldness. And this twofoldness as the essence of the one God has to form the content of the doctrine of his perfections. . . . Therefore, after all that has been said, it will not do to begin now to talk about two different subjects. The oneness of unveiling and veiling, of the knowability and unknowability of God, indeed consti-

[92] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, part 1, p. 429.

tutes the biblical concept of the revelation of God, and again the unity of love and freedom form the biblical concept of the very being of God.[93]

5. *Scholastic categories and the concept of hiddenness*

In following out the distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us," Barth discloses a positive appreciation for the older theology over against the Ritschlian school. This semi-scholastic distinction indicates that Barth is not altogether opposed to the scholastic terms, such as *voluntas beneplaciti, signi,* and the *potentia ordinata.* In so far as the *voluntas beneplaciti* refers to the free decision of God from within himself, to what the scholastics called God's will as pleasing to himself, he is willing to accept it. In so far as it refers to the one will of God which is the foundation of God's activity, namely, the one will which is grounded within himself, he also feels that it is a useful category. The difficulty, suggests Barth, arises when the *voluntas signi* is designated as *improprie* rather than as the actual expression of the *voluntas beneplaciti.* This always has the consequence that the actual or proper nature of God is the unmoved and unsearchable aspect of God behind the *voluntas signi* or revelation. This leads to the consequence that, in so far as it is not clear to what extent the *voluntas signi* is actively grounded in the unsearchable will of God, it is also not clear to what effect it is trustworthy.[94]

Barth also contends that in so far as the *voluntas beneplaciti* signifies the free sovereign will of God which is and must remain a mystery to man, one must accept hiddenness. Hiddenness here means that will is God's will, and in no way related to man's will. If the free decision of God could be grasped or reduced to the level of man's will, it would no longer be freedom, mystery, or hiddenness. Hiddenness as the property of God's freedom therefore belongs to what is known as the *voluntas beneplaciti.*

[93] *Ibid.,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 386.
[94] *Ibid.,* Vol. II, part 1, p. 585.

However, this hidden will of God is also made known to man through his activity in revelation, without ceasing to be his hiddenness. Here the *voluntas beneplaciti* becomes manifest to man as grace. That is, the *voluntas beneplaciti* which represents the freedom of God's revelation is nevertheless the *voluntas signi.* When the *voluntas signi* therefore is understood as the expression of the essential nature of the *voluntas beneplaciti,* that is, as the manifestation of God's free decision of grace, the terminology is useful. Then also no dark uncertain side of God is present, but the essential mystery of his free decision remains.

Barth expresses a similar attitude toward the *potentia absoluta* and the *potentia ordinata.* According to Aquinas, declares Barth, the former meant that which God can will and do, but that which he does not need to will and do. The latter refers to what God actually does in a determinative way. As such, the distinction defines God's power in terms of his own will and as his essential freedom. Therefore it can be accepted.

The difficulty, suggests Barth, is that immediately the *potentia absoluta* took on the character of the *potentia extraordinaria.* What this meant was that instead of the *potentia ordinata* meaning the act of God, it came to mean the orderly established power of God. It acquired the form of law. Against this, and over it, could then only be established the *extraordinaria,* that is, the miraculous breaking of God into his established, orderly power. God's lordship then became more and more the intrusion into the ordinary run of things, rather than the lordship which expresses itself in God's sovereignty over all. Barth states that in the late scholastic view, the *potentia extraordinaria* had an additional slant. It meant a will in God which might have acted differently than it did and which could still do so. Therefore God might have given himself in a completely different manner than he did. Exactly at this point, suggests Barth, Luther saw the real difficulty of late scholasticism. An emphasis upon will which might have been different than the will which is revealed,

makes salvation uncertain. Although Luther saw this problem, Barth does not think that he overcame it by stating that one ought not concern oneself with the *deus absconditus,* that is, with the will of God apart from his will to revelation, but look only to the *deus revelatus.* This still leaves the will of God and the will to salvation uncertain. Barth suggests that in Luther's thought it was not yet clear that the *deus absconditus* is really the *deus revelatus,* that the *potentia absoluta* is really visible in the *potentia ordinata.*

For Barth the distinction can be useful for expressing the freedom of God which makes God's love meaningful. But it cannot be used to express something in God apart from his revelation, in spite of Luther's warning that one ought not speculate at this point. Thus Barth both agrees and disagrees with Luther, and ends by insisting that the *deus absconditus* is the *deus revelatus* and the *deus revelatus,* the *deus absconditus.*

Barth, in his analysis of the meaning of God's hiddenness, has been more decisive than any man studied thus far. He has more consistently connected hiddenness with revelation. Therefore he has distinguished his views from much within the philosophical and theological tradition. But the grounds from which he has done this have always been clear. Nowhere does one find the repudiation of a view because it happens to be philosophical or Greek. It is never philosophy or speculation as such which is attacked. Nor is there any suggestion that the early church fathers are wrong because their categories came out of Greek philosophy. For Barth they are wrong at times because they do not deal adequately with the implications of the doctrine of revelation. This may mean that the theologian's first responsibility is the delineation of the biblical message and that therefore philosophical problems must be pushed aside. But that Barth is not opposed to Greek and scholastic categories as such, is evident in his treatment of the scholastics' terms.

There is then a difference between Brunner and Barth at this

point which is worth noting. Although Barth is usually thought to be more antiphilosophical than Brunner, this distinction needs to be abandoned. Barth is interested in the life of theology in every period. He does not think the philosophical tradition as such has anything to offer to theology. He is very decisive at critical points, but his decisiveness always stems from the perspective of revelation, and not because something is speculation or a dead impersonal system. He is always at great pains to indicate the life of a movement, even the life of nineteenth-century theology. He is willing to learn from those who have engaged in a common enterprise, even when their conclusions have been different from his own.[95] It is not always clear that this is the case in Brunner, in spite of his intention to relate himself to the history of philosophy and theology.

Barth has defined hiddenness exclusively in conjunction with revelation. Under its power he broke through all philosophical and cultural elements in the rediscovery of the gospel and in re-establishing the integrity of theology. But this event has left an absolute line of separation between theology and these enterprises. If Barth, as a theologian, could deal as freely with culture, philosophy, and the history of religion as he does with the whole gamut of theology, including its more philosophical side, the total impact of his theological work might be quite different. He is more critical of the history of philosophy for the task of theology than is Brunner. But as an enterprise of significance, when separated from the center of the Christian faith, it is more alive for Barth than for Brunner. And where philosophical categories are actually a part of the history of theology, Barth is more sympathetic in his understanding than Brunner. Even if one accepts Barth's major premise, the problem of more positive relations with the history of philosophy and culture must be raised. Barth thinks that such an enterprise would again en-

[95] See especially Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert,* pp. 6, 7, 9, 10, 15.

slave theology to an alien task. Nevertheless, in an age in which theology must move past its urgent rediscovery in Barth and Brunner, a constructive relation to the other enterprises of human activity is urgently necessary. This is the theological task which lies not between liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, but *past* neo-orthodoxy.

Chapter V

THE DEUS ABSCONDITUS IN THE THEOLOGICAL ENTERPRISE

A. A NEW DIRECTION IN THEOLOGICAL WORK

From a somewhat unexpected source comes a note of warning for the interpretation of the history of theology. In *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert,*[1] Barth warns against the danger of reading and judging previous theology by looking at it from the perspective of one's own thinking without sufficiently attempting to see the particular problems of the theologians involved. The history of theology can therefore only be written well by those who try to get inside the thinking of those whom they expound. A genuine attempt to understand the inner life of a theological work is demanded. Barth suspects that many poor histories of theology will emerge out of dialectical theology. Their writers will too quickly dismiss theological formulations not to their liking.

He singles out Dorner and Kattenbusch as historians who made the attempt to read the history of theology from the inside. Kattenbusch, as noted in this study, came to conclusions which

[1] Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert,* introductory chapter.

indicate a real grappling with the relation of hiddenness and revelation. He tried to make sense out of Luther by entering into the body of his thought. Consequently, the structure of his understanding is reliable, though the content suffers from the premises of his Ritschlian thought.[2]

The fact remains that the history of theology is written with a theological perspective of one's own; nor should it be otherwise. It ought not be written without trying thoroughly to find a way both into the thought of a period and into the thought of the particular theologian. Only in this way can the history of theology be seen as a unity, and at the same time as a continual witness to the vitality of faith.

The difficulty of such an enterprise is expressed clearly in the diverse ways in which Luther's idea of the hidden God is interpreted. Ritschlian theologians and historians, with the exception of Kattenbusch and Holl, looked at Luther through the eyes of the truth emanating from their own positions. What did not agree with their own premises was considered the remnant of scholasticism or not the genuine Luther. In the case of such men as R. Seeberg and Emanuel Hirsch, the essential unity of Luther's thought was seen. However, it was usually seen at the point which Ritschl rejected, and the genius of Luther in the problem of revelation was missed. Thus the Ritschlians stressed revelation, but did not see its essential relation to hiddenness in Luther's thought. Hirsch and R. Seeberg stressed the unity of Luther's interpretation of hiddenness but did not clearly see its

[2] It does not take much observation to note that the history of theology in the United States is in a difficult plight. American readers seem to be left primarily with Harnack's *History of Dogma,* which covers the early centuries in great detail but which reads the history of theology from the Ritschlian bias on practically every page. McGiffert's *History of Christian Thought,* written from a similar perspective, does not even have the virtue of detail or completeness. Seeberg's work is unfortunately not translated in the latest edition which incorporates materials with great detail and which also is much broader in its scope. Short of the publication of the classics of Christian theology, the time for a more complete and penetrating history of theology is long overdue, particularly in America.

relationship to the problem of revelation.

Althaus and Elert, on the other hand, were inclined to look at Luther from the eyes of Lutheran theologians. It must be said, however, that Althaus did emphasize the essential place of the *theologia crucis* in the thought of Luther. E. Seeberg stressed hiddenness in conjunction with revelation but played down the medieval context. In the case of Rudolf Otto, interesting observations are drawn from Luther and confirmed in the exposition of the history of religions, but nowhere is his revelational thinking seen through the normative character of God's disclosure in Christ. Thus the Ritschlians were caught by talking about Luther's view of revelation, without seeing its relation to the other aspects of his thought. Other interpreters, in spite of their differences, were for the most part convinced about the unity of Luther's thought, particularly in connection with the notion of the hidden God, but did not see its connection with revelation in Christ. From either perspective, Luther could not come into his own.

Brunner, in his attempt to follow Luther, did not adequately distinguish between the essential and nonessential. He made a theological axiom out of Luther's distinction between the knowledge of God apart from Christ and in Christ without recognizing that the former is distinctive of Luther's age. Natural knowledge of God is to be taken more seriously than the Ritschlians implied. But it is not an axiom for our time, as Brunner tends to make it.

Research in Luther which has been associated with neo-Reformation theology—either as its precursor, or as its concomitant, or as following in its wake—has the merit of pointing to the *theologia crucis* as normative for Luther's understanding of theology. It has established that this was not only an important section of his thought, but the pivot around which everything gravitates.[3] While this type of research therefore shows the signifi-

[3] See, e.g. the significant work of Walther von Loewenich, *Luthers Theologia Crucis* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1929).

cance of revelation, it is with a different understanding than the Ritschlians, who also stressed its importance. The difference lies in the apprehension of hiddenness as a correlate of revelation. It is the shift from self-evidence toward the affirmation of God's self-disclosure.

It ought not be forgotten that some of the significant advances in the study of Luther have come out of comparatively recent discoveries of his works, such as his lectures on Romans which date from his early period. Also they grow partially out of the rediscovery of the significance of the meaning of revelation in theology in general and in the Reformation as a particular source for Protestant understanding. Hence the vitality of Luther's thought concerning the centrality of God's disclosure in Christ apprehended in faith, has come to the fore in these more recent studies. This has meant the revitalization of theology and the revitalization of Reformation study. It led to the study of Luther's thought in terms of his fundamental inner motifs.

But it is as if the warning of Barth had to be sounded that to read and understand the history of theology from the perspective of dialectical theology would endanger the understanding of the men represented. Although Erich Seeberg was not in agreement in all points with neo-Reformation theology, he was sufficiently in line with its thought to have fallen into this error. Seeberg admitted the presence of the passages in Luther which did not agree with his analysis but added that Luther did not really accent them or that Luther immediately moved on to the problem of faith. The latter judgment may be true, but it does raise the question whether Luther himself felt the previous passages to be irrelevant or suspected the contradictions to which Seeberg pointed. The centrality of a motif does not render it legitimate to rule out other aspects.

The otherwise excellent work of Loewenich, in which he tries to bring Luther's thought to a focus on the basis of his major writings, also suffers somewhat from his sliding over the relations

of Luther to the scholastics and pre-Reformation thinkers. The same is true of two recent English works, *Let God Be God,* by Philip S. Watson, and *God the Creator, by* George S. Hendry. Certainly the *theologia crucis* is the cornerstone in Luther's thinking. It ought never be considered secondary. That on its basis Luther moved from one problem to another with great freedom is however usually obscured. His loyalty to the *theologia crucis* gave the possibility of dealing with all other areas as he saw fit, without succumbing to an alien aspect. This is true of his relation to scholasticism and mysticism. His apparently contradictory remarks are not necessarily inconsistent when seen from this perspective. That is why Luther could, for example, speak of "whore reason" at one moment, and yet speak of using one's reason in argument with the Turks, and so on.

That theology must deal with the *theologia crucis,* or with God's disclosure in Christ is already evident in the lectures on Romans[4] and in the *Heidelberg Disputation.* The nineteenth and twentieth propositions of the disputation read:

> Not that is legitimately called a theology which takes as true and understands God's unseeable essence through his works, but that is theology which grasps that God's essence has become visible and has been turned to the world, as expressed in suffering and the cross.[5]

And it is already clear that Luther connects the hidden God with God's disclosure in Christ, particularly in his sufferings. "This is clear, that he who does not know Christ, does not know the hidden God in His suffering."[6] Hence, the notion that Luther only later came to an understanding of the connection of the hidden and the revealed God does not seem to follow on the basis of this earlier work.

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[4] Martin Luther, *Vorlesung über den Römerbrief 1515/1516,* Uebertragen von Eduard Ellwein, 2. Auflage (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1928), p. 115.

[5] *Die Heidelberger Disputation Doktor Martin Luthers,* trs. from Latin into German by Georg Merz, in *Zwischen den Zeiten,* 4. Jahrgang, Heft 1, p. 12.

[6] *Ibid.,* p. 13.

Luther's continued emphasis upon the centrality of Christ and hiddenness in him is evident in *The Bondage of the Will,* though it must be seen in a somewhat different, though not inconsistent light. Here he declared, "For neither do we teach any thing but Christ crucified. . . . For there is no other wisdom to be taught among Christians, than that which is 'hidden in a mystery.'" [7] In the commentary on Galatians, Luther suggested that we are not to search God's majesty, not even in the Old Testament sense of Moses, but to look simply to Christ,[8] who is accursed of God.[9] And in his later exposition on Genesis he declared that whosoever loses Christ, who is the revealed God, also loses the hidden God who is not revealed.[10] That God is unsearchable, not only in his works, but also in his word and promises, echoed through Luther's later works as well as in his early.[11]

These passages, which could be duplicated many times, cover the span of Luther's life. They show that concern with Christ stood at the very center and that with it was connected mystery and the hidden character of God in his revelation.

It ought not be denied that Luther spoke of the hiddenness of God apart from his hiddenness in Christ. *The Bondage of the Will* is full of such passages, and the *Commentary on Genesis* is not devoid of them.[12] But the question is whether Luther felt any inconsistency in his own mind concerning these problems. Scholars point to the fact that in the *Commentary on Genesis,* Luther consistently warned against speculation on the doctrine of the hidden God and that here he departed from the earlier, more scholastic tone of *The Bondage of the Will.* Yet the fact remains that Luther never repudiated *The Bondage of the Will*

[7] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will,* p. 80.
[8] Martin Luther, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1930), pp. 22, 24, 36.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 244.
[10] Walch edition of Luther, 740, Vol. II, column 263; or Weimar edition, XLIII, 460, 26ff. Weimar edition hereafter will be abbreviated as *W.A.*
[11] Walch ed., Vol. II, 74; *W.A.,* XLIII, 392, 16ff.
[12] E.g., Walch ed., Vol, II, 269; *W.A.,* XLIII, 463, 3ff.; XLIV, 109, 1177.

and felt to the very end that it was one of his best books. Furthermore, it can be shown that Luther warned against speculation in *The Bondage of the Will* as well as in the *Commentary on Genesis.* It is true, that in *The Bondage of the Will,* Luther insisted that the hidden nature of God be feared and adored. But he warned at the same time against speculation.[13] It is also apparent that while the doctrine of predestination plays a significant role in this work, Luther did not speculate upon its nature. He asked rather about the mystery of God's disclosure of faith. Here, also, he stopped all speculation and held to faith and the goodness of God even when circumstances indicated the contrary.[14] He accepted the hidden character of God's activity in the world as anchored in God behind his revelation. Here there was to be respect but not inquiry. At the same time, the emphasis here, as elsewhere, is that the Christian should look to Christ and to his revelation in the hiddenness of suffering, contrary to all expectations.

Luther himself affirmed the similarity between *The Bondage of the Will* and the *Commentary on Genesis.* In the latter he recalls to mind his teaching in the former, that man is not to concern himself with the hidden God, but rather with the revealed God. Luther did not repudiate his notion of the hidden God even apart from Christ, but he rejected all speculation upon its nature.[15] Thus Luther did not see any contradiction or giving up of his position in his *Commentary on Genesis* when compared with *The Bondage of the Will.*

There is more of a thread running through Luther's writings on this point than is usually assumed. The connection between Luther's early thought in the *Heidelberg Disputaton* and that of *The Bondage of the Will* can be established in spite of a different emphasis. Although the latter is also concerned with Christ, it

[13] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will,* pp. 67, 243, 268-69.
[14] *Ibid.,* pp. 171-73, 243, 268-69.
[15] Walch ed., Vol. II, 258; *W.A.,* XLIII, 458, 36ff.

does speak of the mysteries which remain behind revelation. These mysteries, however, are not to be taken as normative in and of themselves, apart from revelation, as Brunner tends to interpret Luther. The relation between the *Disputation* and *The Bondage of the Will* can be summarized in the words of Loewenich:

> The difference between the two lines can be put together in this way: in the first instance, the notion of the *deus absconditus* signifies that revelation is principally possible in veiling; in the second instance, that also in the revelation of God, mysteries remain. Both lines are to be seen in the context of faith.[16]

Luther's *Commentary on Genesis* combines the two elements emphasized in the *Disputation* and *Bondage of the Will.* Rather than seeing the two strands as inconsistent with each other, in this volume they may be said to be two facets of the same problem. The *Heidelberg Disputation* therefore defines hiddenness primarily in respect to God's disclosure in Christ. This theme is not lost either in *The Bondage of the Will,* or in the *Commentary on Genesis. The Bondage of the Will,* while it rests upon God's hiddenness in Christ, emphasizes the mysteries which remain upon God's revelation. The *Commentary on Genesis* is consistent with this emphasis upon the mysteries and counsels their acceptance without speculation. It is against the *deus absconditus* only when it is a problem of speculation. At the same time, the *Commentary on Genesis* is full of passages which speak of God's veiling in revelation,[17] and of God's hiddenness in his working, as in the form of the Passion or in the form of the devil.[18]

This consistent character is no less apparent in the freedom which the *theologia crucis* gave Luther in dealing with the thought of his time. Luther used scholastic categories but gave

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[16] Loewenich, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[17] *W.A.*, XXXI, 2, 77, 21ff.; XLII, 2, 28ff.

[18] *W.A.*, XLIII, 140, 28ff.; 392, 16ff.

them his own content. He rejected the speculation which accompanies these categories in scholastic thought, as he does in *The Bondage of the Will* in the repudiation of speculation on the ordinary and absolute will of God.[19] At the same time, the distinction between "God in himself" and "God for us" is kept, though the Christian must start from the latter. If *The Bondage of the Will* is seen as Luther's attempt, on the basis of the *theologia crucis,* to combat the thought of his day from various sides, it is a great work in apologetics. Luther's theological independence but his willingness to deal with the thought of his day—whether he understood or misunderstood it—is suggestive for the study of Luther and for theological methodology in our day. It led Luther to praise the work of Dionysius the Areopagite and yet to set what he had to say about the hiddenness of God in the framework of Christ.[20] But it also led him to attack the speculations of Dionysius.[21] Luther could also write a very enthusiastic preface to the *Theologia Germanica,* commenting that, next to the Bible and Augustine, it meant more to him than any other book. At the same time, Luther held to the centrality of God's disclosure in Christ, in fact so consistently that in his own day no one missed the point.

In the thought of his day, Luther also could speak of a natural knowledge of God, but yet point to the unmistakable conclusion that God is not really known for what he is in this way. It is this freedom of Luther, when seen from the context of the theology of the cross, which eliminates the necessity of insisting that Luther taught a natural knowledge of God as normative for theology. A natural knowledge of God was taken for granted in his day, in much the same way as it is generally denied today. But in an age in which the natural knowledge of God was taken for granted, Luther could utilize and repudiate this concept from

[19] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will,* p. 243.
[20] *W.A.,* III, 124, 29ff.
[21] *W.A.,* XLIII, 71.

the standpoint of the theology of the cross. In Luther we may discover anew the independence of theology, and its freedom from this point to come to grips with the thought of every age.

Theology must be a meaningful wrestling with the faith which emerges for one out of the Bible. This expresses the independent character of the theological enterprise. But the moment in which this is said, one ought also ask questions on the basis of the history of theology and on the basis of the situation of man, including his nature, his place in history, and his reflections about himself and the world.

The previous chapters indicate the revitalization of the theological enterprise in the rediscovery of the significance of the correlation of hiddenness and revelation. But none of the interpreters takes as seriously as Luther the question of communicating to the world in which man lives. For that task, theology must move past Barth and Brunner, not behind them. Liberal theology is finally not suggestive at this point, since it succumbed to the perspective of the world in which it lived.

On the limited question of the relation of the theological enterprise to the history of theology, Barth, as noted previously, is more suggestive than Brunner. From Ritschl and Brunner one gathers the impression that large parts of the history of theology were never really alive, since they reflect speculation and Greek metaphysics. Barth differentiates his own analysis more decisively from that of others than do either Brunner or Ritschl; but in his case it is never because of speculation or Greek philosophy as such. Barth suggests that such thought forms at times hindered proper understanding. But he is more concerned with the situations in which they arose and with the formulations as adequate or inadequate in such contexts. Barth always asks himself the question, "Can I learn here positively or negatively, but in any case, can I learn?" Learning therefore is always appreciative, even where the sharpest lines are drawn.

It is unfortunate that Barth does not apply the same type of

analysis to the history of religions or the philosophical enterprise. It must be said that he does not set himself against these expressions as one who misunderstands what is said. But he thinks them infinitely removed from the theological concern, since they speak of matters which are quite different from that of theology. While Barth is sympathetic with the history of theology, even to the point of utilizing concepts which come from the realm of philosophy, he is not as sympathetic in respect to philosophy as such. While he appreciatively quotes some of the distinctions of Aquinas—which to Brunner are too speculative, but which Barth reinterprets—he cannot see any possible use of the philosophical heritage, such as the thought of Plato, for theology. The same can be said of his treatment of the history of religions.

It is, of course, true that for the Christian theologian, Christian theology is more essential than the history of philosophy and the history of religions. But it may be necessary to transform, utilize, and "baptize" concepts from these areas. It is always necessary to state that the unknown God of Plato or Kant is different from that of Christian theology. But is it not also possible and necessary to utilize this expression within the context of theology, indicating that it is exactly here where this expression can and must be used? If such a procedure is taken without obscuring the offense of the cross, it may at least serve as a partial medium of communication.

Barth's refusal to deal with the history of religions and philosophy in this way stems out of his concern that theology be strictly a theology of the church, together with his fear that even descriptive work will confuse the essential task of theology. In the context of this interest it is possible to explain why Barth is not so vehement in his rejection of the *via negativa* and *eminentiae* as one would expect. These categories have been used in the context of the Christian mystics, against whom Barth stands, but whom he also tolerates in the history of Christian theology. Again, however, it must be clear that Barth does not have a

contempt for philosophy as a discipline. For him, the problem is not that philosophy is dead but that it does not and cannot speak of the life of Christianity, which is known only through its self-communicating and its self-authenticating character.

A more fruitful approach will not sacrifice the rigid insistence that theology be nourished in biblical revelation. In this task, there must be a special eye upon the history of theology as the expression of similar attempts throughout Christian history. But there should be more than a glance at the history of religion and the history of philosophy. A proper correlation of revelation and hiddenness will safeguard the latter venture. Such a correlation and its implications for theology comprise the materials of the two following sections.

B. REVELATION AND HIDDENNESS REFOCUSED

1. *Hiddenness and the nature of revelation*

The concept of hiddenness rigorously correlated with revelation means that revelation is neither self-evident nor demonstrable. Revelation involves communication which is ordinarily not apparent, and which in its reception includes mystery as well as meaning. Its relation to hiddenness means further that revelation is a "seeing through" predicated upon "being grasped." Therefore there is no general revelation if by the term is meant some reality which ought to be generally observable. Revelation always occurs to individuals and groups. It does not apply to individuals and groups as a phenomenon which they ought to observe by looking around them, in nature or in history. Nature or history may reveal God to some and not to others. Such disclosure will be distorted unless it is checked by the apprehension of God in Christ. But it is disclosure none the less.

The idea of disclosure involves the communication of that which is hidden, even if it is in a distorted form. It could conceivably occur to all men. But it cannot be conceived as a reality which men ought to see by looking at the created order. In

such a case, general revelation is a type of natural theology in which men are asked to draw deductions on the basis of God's imprint on the world. It is sight and deduction. It is only in revelation, whether in Christ or apart from him, that God can be seen even in a distorted form.

The correlation of revelation and hiddenness emphasizes that the Divine communicates across all boundaries. Structurally, this point is emphasized alike by Rudolf Otto and Karl Barth. Speaking only of the structure, Brunner is alien to both in his analysis of general revelation. His analysis always implies that creation shows forth a knowledge of God, however improper and distorted. It is something which all men who see correctly ought to apprehend, even though it is not the true God or God in his saving activity. In so far as Brunner generalizes this aspect into applicability to all men, he inevitably falls into a kind of natural theology in spite of his abhorrence of this term. Actually the most distorted revelation is revelation to someone, even if it should in its aggregate include all men. Where there is revelation, one cannot say that everyone who uses his eyes properly will see. Even revelation in the most distorted sense involves the opening of eyes.

Rudolf Otto's permanent contribution is that he has seen this phenomenon in the history of religions. His emphasis upon the wholly other is not affirming that God is such from the standpoint of man; rather it is that in the history of religions the powers of divinity manifest themselves in this way. They make themselves known from out of their hiddenness for the life of man and, in this disclosure, introduce such new mysteries that man can never possess his gods. Where possession is possible, the power of the religion is already broken.

He has also shown that revelation always implies a positive side over against all its negative manifestations. For primitive man the revelation of the wholly other is usually found in awesome circumstances and is experienced as fearful. But this fear

is intimately connected with the notion that the powers have something positive to do with him. From the very beginning the religious experience has the element of the gracious presence as well as the demonic fear. To insure the former against the latter may be the aim of primitive man, but thereby the nature of the first as a fundamental reality is not eliminated.

The study of primitive man and of the history of religions, with some exceptions of course, shows that the incessant danger is that the terribleness of God overshadows his mercy. For modern man, on the other hand, God has become so much at home in the world that his wholly otherness has been lost and wrath is not experienced. The fundamental question therefore is whether or not, on the basis of general revelation or on the basis of speaking of the wrath of God apart from Christ, we can in our day come to the fundamental understanding of the wrath of God in relation to his mercy.

It is a doubtful premise to speak of the wrath of God as God apart from Christ, as Brunner does. The only way this is possible is if one has already discovered the mercy of God, either in Christ or apart from Christ. The possibility of speaking of God's wrath apart from God's mercy can only exist in an age in which belief in God is a part of the fabric of the age, and in which therefore the problem is how God can be a God of mercy. In short, the problem of Luther is no longer directly the problem of our time. This Brunner has not recognized and has therefore elaborated a dated side of Luther as if it were a matter of permanent theological significance. Our problem is that we shall have to discover the wrath of God as well as his mercy, or exactly his wrath in his mercy. To speak of the judgment of God, or of the wrath of God in our day is possible only on the basis of faith. It is therefore a doubtful statement of Barth that if we could really know God apart from Christ, we would know him as a God of wrath. This is already a statement of faith and therefore ought not be made as a general statement.

One can, of course, maintain that the experience of primitive man, or the experience of men throughout the ages who have felt the terrible character of God and therefore could not escape him, is a profounder experience than that of contemporary man for whom God is a factor whom he continually tries either to create or escape. But this is also a statement from within the context of faith.

One can make a case that modern man believes in a God of his own creation and therefore at heart is religious. All these experiences of man must be taken into account. Nevertheless, because of this general situation it is of no avail to speak either of general revelation, or of God's wrath as a prelude to Christian theology, or as an integral part of the theological enterprise. The conclusion, therefore, is that to speak of the hidden character of God either in the sense of general revelation (Brunner and Althaus), or of natural theology (Elert), or of God's wrath and terribleness apart from Christ (Brunner) is impossible except as it is already grounded in an experience of God's mercy or of his presence. Because men happen in a particular age or circumstance to believe in the existence of God and in another time do not happen to believe in God, is not a matter of significance unless the belief in God means that this God in some manner or other speaks meaningfully to man in the context of his experience. This meaningful experience is not guaranteed by a concept of general revelation apart from a saving knowledge, nor by natural theology, nor by an attempt initially to speak of him as a God of wrath. God must speak to man in order for man to know him as a living God, and it is only on this basis that he becomes a problem to man, namely, as One who in this speaking to him is the hidden One. Where this hiddenness is absent, it is not God who speaks, but man who speaks of a God who has not really manifested himself.

It is more important to note again that in the history of religions, as well as in the Old Testament, the manifestation of God

in a positive sense is prior to the manifestation of God as either a God of wrath or a God of hiddenness. When, therefore, God's hiddenness and wrath are seen from the standpoint of grace, it is clear that one cannot start with the premise that God is hidden and then reveals himself. In the extent to which Brunner vacillates at this point, a considerable degree of ambiguity is evident in his thought.

2. *Revelation and revelation in Christ*

While the structural understanding of revelation is similar in Otto and Barth, the latter insists upon revelation in Christ as the only point where God is known. The act of God in giving himself to be known in faith through the witnessing power of the Holy Spirit means, for Barth, that this is to know God as he is and as he could not be known except for his disclosure. Then one discovers that one could not have known him in any other way. And to know God in this way is to discover how hidden he is.

One must agree that God is only fully known in this way. But if revelation is defined only in this manner what is one to say of the Old Testament and of the history of religions? Brunner and Barth maintain that the God who manifests himself in Christ is also the God who calls Abraham and Israel, and is rejected by the latter in his full disclosure in Christ. They confess this can only be seen from the standpoint of the New Testament. There is, of course, a tendency in European theology today to see Christ in the pages of the Old Testament, rather than an anticipation of Christ in the suffering and strugglings of Israel. But it would not be accurate to connect Barth or Brunner directly with this movement.[22] For Barth, the Old Testament is the "awaiting revelation." But it is nevertheless revelation, for

[22] It is true that Barth has not disassociated himself with this group, represented by such men as Wilhelm Vischer. Further, his latest volumes raise the question of whether or not he has been partially influenced by this movement.

it deals with the God who has called Abraham and who creates Israel. It begins with the God who is a God of mercy exactly in that he has called this people into being. He is, to be sure, the God who hides himself, who shows only his back, and who in his activity in the world becomes a terribly hidden God. The relations of Jacob and Esau, Israel and the other nations, the choosing and rejection of Israel, all testify to the enigma of this God and yet no one can let him go. They testify of him against their wishes, as do Isaiah and Jeremiah.

The important point, it seems to me, is that the hiddenness of God, both in his communication and in the activities of Israel, is predicated first of all upon God's mercy in calling Israel into being. He is the holy One, who has shown his mercy, but who at that moment becomes the worst problem of all. Surely here is a saving God, though his judgments become unsearchable and though his final disclosure of himself is rejected by those to whom God chose to reveal himself.

But what about the history of religions? Can they be dismissed as the imaginations of men who build their own religions, or as the inventions of priests for their own advantages? Are the gods of the history of religion related in any way to the God of Israel who has concretely manifested himself in Christ? In *Revelation and Reason,* Brunner tries to relate himself creatively to the entire compass of the history of religions, but ends by refuting all of them on the basis of the disclosure of God in Christ. Barth, in his *Dogmatics,* also characterizes all religion and religions as "unbelief." From the perspective of the disclosure of God in Christ, this is of course true, and no Christian theologian ought to look for God anywhere else. However, the difficulty of such an interpretation, if it is rigorously applied to the history of religions, is that religions as such become an invention of man. The material of the history of religions, shown by Rudolf Otto, testifies to experiences which point to the reality of some type of disclosure. The wholly other gods are also the

gods to whom people are drawn, and drawn not merely by the fear of completely demonic power. The experience of this type of power is hardly the creation of man—less so it would appear, in fact, than the reflective notion of the wrath of God apart from Christ.

If it is maintained that the God who has disclosed himself in Christ is also the God who has manifested himself in the history of religions, can one say that the history of religions stands in any sense in a similar relation to the disclosure in Christ, as the God of the Old Testament stands to the New? On the premise that the history of religions is a genuine experience, though not the experience of God as he is fully manifested, one must ascribe to it a place in the preparatory revelation. And this must be done exactly on the basis of the relation of revelation and hiddenness.

The history of religions stands in a different relation to the problem of God's disclosure in Christ than the history of philosophy in general, for which no revelation is usually claimed, or if claimed, is affirmed apart from hiddenness. At other times, philosophers speak in the name of hiddenness, but not of revelation. The history of religions, on the other hand, is replete with illustrations of the revealed and hidden character of the gods.

There is a line which runs from the history of religions, through the Old Testament to the New Testament. A great gap lies between the history of religions and the Old Testament. But the results of natural theology and the data of general revelation when discerned apart from the disclosure of God in Christ, are even further removed from the problem of God's revelation and God's hiddenness than is the history of religions. Where revelation is experienced, whether in the history of religions or in the experience of Christ, it must be taken seriously. Communication of this type is given and does not grow out of general reflection upon the created order of things, as in natural theology.

It must nevertheless be said that there is a greater gulf which

divides the history of religions from the Old Testament than there is between the Old Testament and the New. We do not find the God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ *evident* in the history of religions, but we cannot therefore exclude his presence. He is, however, evident in the Old Testament, as it is understood on the basis of the New. More than this one perhaps cannot and ought not say. For Christian theology, therefore, one ought not look for the norm in the history of religions, but rather for the meaning of God's revelation in Christ as seen in the New Testament and especially prepared for in the Old Testament. But this abrogation of the history of religions ought never mean its outright nullification, as it often does in the history of theology. Likewise, in the relation of the Old Testament to the New Testament, God's disclosure in the New means the decisive break with the Old. This is its normative abrogation rather than its outright abrogation.

It must always be recognized that there is no direct line, not even from the Old Testament to the New. In God's disclosure of Christ, something new has happened which transforms all relations and which, therefore, is not on a par with any preceding events, nor to be compared with them. There is a sense in which natural theology, the history of religions, and the Old Testament equally mean the denial of the New Testament. Perhaps what ought to be said is that the structure of revelation and hiddenness which in some sense is manifest in the history of religions, in the Old Testament, and finally in the New Testament, is one in which the nature of revelation is intensified and with it the character of hiddenness. In the history of religions, the nature of revelation is never too explicit. Usually it takes the form of showing the necessity and the nature of God's requirement for the purification of man, while hiddenness has the character of not being able to comprehend the nature of this God. In the Old Testament, God's revelation is manifest in his choosing of Israel and in all the events of her history. But why God

should act in the way in which he does, why his mercy should appear so hidden and often in the form of wrath, becomes the chief problem. Precisely where God is most revealed, he is most hidden. But also because he is hidden, the Old Testament clings to his revelation with an unheard of tenacity.

This is apparent in its deepest dimension in the manifestation of Christ on the cross. Exactly when the Old Testament cannot understand the character and nature of its suffering, the New Testament makes bold to declare that God in Christ has taken into himself the sufferings of the world. Precisely when the Jews found it increasingly difficult to accept, much less understand, the double-edged character of the plight of the chosen people—why they suffered so much and also why they were so evil—God seemed to answer this problem by his suffering on the cross. And it became the Christian affirmation that exactly when God seems most hidden, when his sufferings become the avenue of man's redemption, then God is most clearly revealed, and at the same time most deeply hidden. It is this which made St. Paul declare that the cross is a stumbling block, but that it is also the foundation of faith. The "why" of the cross remains the greatest enigma of history, but it testifies that it is the free act of God wherein he manifests his love for mankind.

It is therefore no wonder that Christianity finds itself in the situation of basing its foundation on that which is at heart inexplicable but which can become a new source of meaning if it is apprehended in faith. If God is really seen at this point, he is seen in his most terrible hiddenness. The disclosure in Christ means that now God is known while he remains hidden and that his hiddenness is established in this very act. This is not the way in which man would have defined God or the way in which he would have conceived him. But because God in this way sets the bounds between himself and man in giving himself to man, the hiddenness of God is a correlate of revelation and not a general proposition.

3. *Suffering as the wrath of God*

In the cross of Christ, the problem of theodicy which continually recurs in the Old Testament and which plagues men of every age, is transformed—not by a direct answer—but by pointing to the sufferings of the innocent Lamb of God. To see this act of God is in effect to be silenced on the question of why the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper, or why those who are the elect in God are also those who have tribulation. In short, this makes it clear that Christianity at its best has never held that Christianity brings prosperity or goodness in its wake. Short of the New Testament, Job is essentially the best answer which can come from the God of Israel. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul seems to give comfort in his statement that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to man.[23] One cannot, however, as is so often done, make this passage mean that eventually the Christians will have their day. The enigma of suffering, the disproportionate relations of relative goodness and suffering, are not erased by the faith of Paul who can speak of the glory to come. In fact, it is doubtful that Paul had the problem of theodicy in mind. He was speaking rather of the glory of the kingdom in contrast to this life, but not as an answer to the problem of suffering. The problem of suffering is given a twist by indicating that God himself suffers on the cross, but therein shows his strength and victory over the world. Herein it is made manifest that in some sense suffering will be man's lot, but without the implication that his suffering is the means of his triumph as it is in the case of God. This implication of vicarious suffering does not, however, erase the problem of untold suffering in relation to the problem of goodness and justice. To the man of faith, it is given rather to see the enigma of suffering in the cross itself. And out of this enigma, he shall not be able to answer that of his own. But seeing in the riddle of the cross the power of God, he will yet

[23] Romans 8:18.

be able to live with a dimension of trust which leaves unanswered the mystery of his own life, but which does not reduce his life to meaninglessness. He lives therefore at the edge of meaninglessness, but the hidden yet manifest sovereignty of God in the cross and resurrection becomes the power of meaning which defies all meaninglessness.

Living in this dimension, he shall in fact discover that the fundamental meaning of the cross, whatever its enigma, is that God has manifested both his mercy and his wrath. It is the mercy of God in that God, out of his freedom, so loves the world that he is willing to suffer for it. It is the wrath of God in that the suffering of God indicates the deep price which God must pay and the depth of his opposition to the sin of man. A man's general opposition and rebellion toward God, not his particular degree of sin in that rebellion, is the fundamental problem in the God-man relationship. When a man apprehends the mercy of God in Christ, then does he see the depth of God's wrath.

Whereas previously man knew of God's wrath from the perspective of God's mercy, as in Israel, or as in the history of religions, wrath is now understood more fully. In the cross, where God's mercy is most manifest, his wrath appears at its fullest. This fact makes wrath a problem of the fear of God in faith, and not a problem apart from faith. The man who is a believer and at the same time an unbeliever is placed in the situation of mercy, but in the kind of mercy which might at another moment be transformed into wrath. But then it must also be said that the Christian who experiences God's wrath is the man who may in the providence of God again experience his mercy. But exactly because he has experienced his mercy, God's wrath seems so serious.

4. *Faith and hiddenness*

Revelation is not an event which can be established like other events. The event itself, while it reveals, is always hidden.

Therefore it is an event which itself is apprehended only in faith. If God's presence in Jesus Christ were a matter of self-evidence, as in the Ritschlian school, the nature of revelation would be destroyed. To see God in Christ is not a matter of self-evidence, but belongs to the type of communication which is known in and through God's hiddenness and which is again hidden upon its communication. This is what Barth has seen so clearly in his analysis of veiling in unveiling, and unveiling in veiling. To see God in Christ is, therefore, an event in faith, testified by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the midst of man's spirit, that here God has entered history for man's sake.

The moment in which this is a reality for man, it does not remain accessible for him like other realities. To be in faith, or to experience God's grace in one's own life does not bring with it the continuation of that experience. The believer in every moment may and does again become an unbeliever, to whom faith ever and again needs to be born. The most miserable man is the one who has experienced God's grace but who cannot experience it again and who longs for it with all his heart. It is he who really experiences wrath. It belongs, however, to the providence of God that to him to whom faith has once been a reality, who therefore submits to God and who in the claim of God's obedience continues to search for him, to such a one God promises continual mercy and, ever and again, the granting of the power of faith.

This experience is illustrated over and over in the life of Luther. Luther's darkest days were not necessarily those in which he had not yet discovered the grace of God and was trying through works plus faith to find peace with God. Some of his darkest days came rather when in the experience of faith, he discovered that he again was a man who did not have faith but longed for it. These were the days which are called his experiences of *Anfechtung*—the despair of soul in the absence of faith and the temptation which this brought to him. But Luther also

learned to live from one experience of mercy to another on the basis of God's promise.

The words of St. Paul are relevant here, that in the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith." [24] Although the word "faith" is used twice, it is not meant in the same sense. To discover the righteousness of God as revealed through faith, that is, to experience God's mercy, is the power by which one may live in the kind of faith which can be called trust. One may trust God, not because he can posit that he is trustworthy but because he has known God's mercy. Although one does not experience it now, because he is hidden from man, one may also trust that his mercies will again become real.

It must always be said that the activity of man is not irrelevant in the experience of God's grace, whether it is man's dutiful response to God's love or whether it is the thankfulness of worshiping the Almighty. But it is also clear that no activity can force God's mercy. Sometimes it appears to come in spite of man's will or when it is unexpected or when one is fighting against God himself. This freedom in the operation of God's mercy can never be taken as an excuse for irresponsibility. Man must search for God in the Bible and in the church which is based on the Bible's message. But this in itself will never insure that God will make himself known.

5. *The mystery of faith and the unfathomable mystery of God*

The most pressing and baffling problem is the mystery of why particular individuals are believers and others are not. Predestination and double predestination are attempts to deal with this issue, by placing a decree or double decree in the hidden will of God. The difficulty of this problem and the difficulties which it caused Luther are evidenced in the previous chapters. Most theologians maintain that double predestination is impossible, since it posits in God a will toward damnation when his will is toward

[24] Romans 1:17, Revised Standard Version.

salvation. Others suggest that double predestination signifies the willingness to be damned for the sake of the glory of God. But it was pointed out that this attitude no longer means a double decree, because such a man has experienced the full grace of God, and now wholly commits himself to him.

For one or the other of these reasons, most theologians speak of predestination but not of double predestination. Brunner was particularly vehement at this point, insisting that double predestination introduces a decree in God, while predestination is necessary in order to insure the seriousness of man's relation to God. In this interpretation, the emphasis is not upon the idea that some men are predetermined to salvation while others are not. The point of insistence is that man must have freedom, that is, he must not be a puppet who is subject to the decree of God in one way or another. Man therefore is not free to choose God but he is free to reject God. God makes his continual offer to man, but he does not compel. God wishes to establish a relationship, but man is able to reject.

On the basis of these two facets, the logic of double predestination and the logic of predestination, some of the historians connected predestination exclusively with the presence of faith (R. Seeberg, Holl, Heim). What they said in effect, is that if one has faith one is predestined. In addition, predestination gives a firmer ground for salvation than the rising and ebbing character of man's faith (E. Seeberg, Hirsch).

In all of these alternatives, a more puzzling question remains. If man cannot make the decision to be a believer unless somehow through the grace of God this happens, why does one man have faith and another not? This is not a denial of the seriousness of the decision nor of the fact that one has to be made. Nor is the decision changed as a decision by the fact that the believer confesses that he has been led to this point—once he discovers himself to be a believer. The problem arises when it is felt that the willingness of decision is not enough. Nor is the injunction to

make a decision sufficiently compelling. Without decision faith cannot occur, but decision will not make faith. One cannot help thinking of Ivan in Dostoevski's novel, the *Brothers Karamazov,* who wanted to believe but could not, and whose desperation led him to the borders of insanity. The injunction that whosoever seeketh shall find does not sufficiently answer this baffling problem. Why the possibility of faith has been given to one and not to another is still the mystery of God's election.

It is exactly this problem which is not solved by the emphasis upon man's self-exclusion from God's mercy. Nor is it solved by positing a double decree in God. The difficulty of this, for me, does not lie in an apparent destruction of the freedom of man, but in positing a double character in God at a point where he does not reveal himself. It involves hiddenness as an area where revelation is not operative, whereas hiddenness and revelation must always be kept together. Nor, on the other hand, does the view of Barth—that Christ died also for him who is not of faith—solve the problem. The danger here is not, as Brunner would have it, that it takes the seriousness out of the decision of faith. Not to be able to believe is sufficiently "hell" itself, and to believe is already to be in the state of seriousness. The difficulty rather is that it is too definite concerning the activity of God, as if the lordship of Christ over all of history solved the problem. To be sure, Christ died also for him without faith. Yet he died also for the purpose of faith. Why therefore a man cannot have faith is still the mystery which surrounds the activity of God. It is the mystery which seems to remain locked in the heart of God himself. Nor does it help to speak, as Brunner does, of an aspect of God which is different from his revelation. This also says too much and has the same danger as the notion of a decree which Brunner is trying to avoid. It is better to insist upon the mystery of God without establishing a separate niche for it within the Godhead.

Belonging to the mystery of God, however, means that one

cannot speculate about it. It has been affirmed that one cannot conceive of the wrath of God apart from his mercy, and therefore one ought not speak of the wrath of God in connection with the "why" of the absence of faith. It is true that God exercises his wrath and his judgments in life and history, but these, however terrible, must be seen as the work of mercy, and not as some secret will which can be posited in the nature of God apart from his mercy. This is why Barth speaks of the freedom of God in his love, without making God different than he manifests himself, while maintaining the essential difference between the Creator and the creature, between the holy God and the sinful creature.

One can also agree generally with Barth that the question of why faith is not born in all men remains a part of the mystery of God in the same sense as the mystery of his creation and his concern for man. It is exactly here that hiddenness means what the word implies. If one could speculate upon the "why" of creation and the "why" of redemption, without grounding it simply in the hidden freedom of God, the creature could say something of God apart from revelation. In the giving of himself God has shown his absolute difference from man, but at the same time has given himself as he is, both in his mercy as grace and in his mercy as wrath.

But this way of phrasing it is finally impossible. Barth does not adequately take into account the unfathomable and abysmal nature of the God who has made himself known. He affirms only God's free decision. This is sufficient to distinguish his analysis from Ritschl in a decisive way. But he states the mystery of God's action without enough concern for God's essential mystery. Brunner, on the other hand, vacillates between the identification of God in himself and revelation, and the positing of a separate province within the Godhead apart from his manifestation in Christ.

The correlation of hiddenness and revelation, as apprehended

in faith, points rather to the affirmation of the ungraspable nature of God in integral relation to his disclosure. This means that God is not different in essence than he manifests himself. But that manifestation itself is mystery as well as meaning, and comes out of a God who remains unfathomable, but of whom it may be affirmed that he is trustworthy on the basis of faith. God's dealing with the world, even in faith, points to an abyss which man cannot comprehend. Here, with Luther, one can say that the essence of faith is to believe God just who appears so unjust. Such a situation must be affirmed rather than explained. Barth takes some of the mystery away, and Brunner establishes an area for it. But the mystery of God remains mystery even in revelation. His revelation is not merely to be separated from his nature by freedom, nor is his strange activity to be explained by God apart from revelation. In either case, one claims to know too much. The God who reveals is the totally mysterious God, whom man trusts on the basis of a definite disclosure which emerges in a center of mystery. This center can give new power and understanding because it is the mystery made manifest as truly God. It leaves intact the riddle of God whom man confidently follows in the light which has entered the world. This light defines God's nature in the meaningful combination of content and mystery.

The Christian therefore does not live by sight. He lives on the basis of the hidden but yet declared sovereignty of God expressed in Christ, through which God continually claims man for himself in obedience and forgiveness. This gives the Christian the possibility of living in the world with all seriousness and without the necessity of finding the meaning of life immersed in life itself. In fact, this dimension gives meaning to all of his existence, making the events of life meaningful but not ultimate. Because of this hidden sovereignty, already hiddenly manifest in the world but not consummated, man is prepared to live in the midst of tragedy and suffering. He is not, therefore, caught in the vacillation of meaning and meaninglessness that encompasses the

events of the world. He cannot, of course, give them their full meaning. But he does believe that in the providence of God all life, at its best and at its worst, lies within the domain of the purpose of God, though the events as they are cannot be equated with the final purpose of God. For the Christian, therefore, the world as such is neither fully rational nor is it irrational. It stands under the mystery of God, who yet in the midst of it has declared his sovereignty over it to the eyes of faith, to those who trust in the ever revealed and ever hidden sovereignty and purpose of God. The Christian believes that his faith is partially validated in the events of history, and he may try to convince others that this is true. But there is nevertheless no short cut from this confession of meaning to the conversion of another, unless the other has also been grasped by the same God who already has spoken his word to the hearts of men.

In the rigor of Christian thinking, one cannot escape starting with the revelation of God in Christ and the consequence of the hiddenness of God. In Christ, God is made known to man, and the distorted revelations of the history of religions and the incomplete disclosure of the God of Israel are seen in their proper perspective. Revelation also defines the nature of faith and its mystery as grounded in the essential mystery of God. It places the notion of wrath under the free mercy of God, and makes it meaningful in the perspective of faith. It supplies a new estimation of suffering, and gives resources of meaning for life which take seriously the character of this world without becoming ultimately enmeshed in it. In short, the necessary relation of revelation and hiddenness has implications for every theological problem. If what has been said, therefore, appears as a miniature theology in which many problems remain unsolved, it only proves the significance of the problem of hiddenness.

C. TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE

The problem of the nature and relationship of transcendence and immanence can be seen from a different perspective on the

basis of the preceding analysis of hiddenness and revelation. The word "transcendence" has been used in many ways. Some of the most apparent are that God transcends man's categories, that he is the wholly other, that he is utterly different than anything in this world. With it often goes the accompanying thought that God is so removed from the world that he is not present in it in any form. Sometimes neo-Reformation theology is attacked because opponents believe that in it God has become so removed from the world that he can only enter like a bolt of lightning from the outside. This attack is usually made by the contenders for immanence. Whether or not their contention is correct need not concern us here. Let it simply be noted that if God's transcendence means that the supernatural strikes into the natural, either in the sense of suspending or shattering the latter, it is no longer in the legitimate realm of theology. Transcendence defined in this way may be characteristic of Protestant orthodoxy, but not of neo-Reformation theology.

It is true, of course, that Barthian theology (as distinct from Barth) in its early stages was tempted by a terminology which bordered on such a description. The phraseology frequently used, "plumb down from above," was subject to this kind of interpretation. Although intending a qualitative distinction, many left the impression that God is so removed from the world that he enters by a capricious striking into it from time to time at particular points in history.

When a similar view of transcendence is voiced but is not connected with God's striking into the world, God becomes the unknown, in the sense of agnosticism. But unlike agnosticism, his unknowableness is considered a credit to his majesty. Although God's presence is hardly ever consistently denied, nevertheless in this type of thinking the emphasis lies upon the transcendent character rather than upon the manifestation of God. Elements of this feeling were present in the early Barthian movement, ascribed to them, however, mainly by their opponents.

The difficulty with the word "transcendent," aside from the previous distortions, is its base. Is the transcendence of God to be defined from the side of man's inability to grasp God, or is it grounded upon man's confession of the act of revelation? If it rests on the first, then the words "wholly other," "utterly different from," are not grounded upon any definite content. To say that God is above the world, or completely different from the world is not very illuminating unless one has a basis of content from which such a statement can be made. Such content implies that God has made himself manifest in the world from which he is different. A notable attempt to express what is implied in such an analysis has been made by Karl Heim in his book *God Transcendent.* In it he pleads for a metaphysic on the basis of God's disclosure to man. But in trying to work it out, he finds it necessary to define transcendence as a dimensional category rather than as a category of otherness, or aboveness, thus implying a Newtonian view of space and time. One can only ask at the end of Heim's analysis, in which he tried to demolish a traditional world view, whether he has said anything more than what the terminology of the I-Thou relationship implies. In indicating that this is a different dimensional problem, he has really departed from what has always been the traditional use of the word "transcendence." [25]

It must be noted again that one of the most classic analyses of what might be called transcendence, Otto's *Idea of the Holy,* is predicated upon the wholly other character of God, precisely because Otto felt that this is the way in which God manifests himself. If Otto did not give Christian content to what he is suggesting, structurally he contended for the same kind of analysis, namely, that the experience of otherness is based upon communication. Therefore the contention that otherness removes

[25] Another interesting attempt, though from a completely different point of departure, to break through the traditional metaphysical formulations, is given in an extremely brilliant but equally difficult book by Charles Hartshorne, entitled *Man's Vision of God.*

God from history and life hardly strikes at the right point. The most enthusiastic contenders for God's difference from the world have, for the most part, based this assertion upon the basis of God's disclosure.

It is also suggestive to note at this point that what Otto did in the history of religions can be compared to Heim's attempt in theology. Whereas Heim was contending for a separate metaphysical understanding of Christian revelation, Otto was contending that the religious is a separate dimension. This meant that the experience of the wholly other was by definition different from all other experiences. This is why Otto's work ought not be understood as psychology of religion, but really as an attempt at ontological expression.

The difficulty with the word "transcendence" for Christian theology is that it does not mean what its antagonists contend, and it does not express what its protagonists wish. To say that God is transcendent in the Christian sense would be tantamount to affirming that God has made himself known in Christ and that this disclosure reveals God to be of a completely different order from this world. But even this would not be saying enough, precisely because revelation has also to do with God's mercy, with God's wrath in that mercy, and with God's grace at the same time. On the basis of God's self-communication, a qualitative distinction is implied. It is doubtful that the word "transcendence" means at one and the same time both presence and difference in this sense.

In an attempt to meet this difficulty, the words "transcendence" and "immanence" have often been used together. More specifically, it has been said that God is transcendent in his immanence. But at this point it becomes doubtful that this expression can be used from the side of immanence.

It is perhaps unnecessary to refute the doctrine of immanence as such in the realm of Christian theology. Nor need the usual charge of pantheism, hurled this time from the side of Barthian

theology, be taken too seriously. If God is identified in any sense with the world, if he is a part of the stuff of the world, if he dwells within it by the very nature of creation, there is justification for this charge. The idea of a spark of the divine in man also falls under the same kind of charge since it does not sufficiently differentiate between the Creator and the creature.

In Christian theology, immanence usually means that God does come into the world, that he works in and through the structures of the world, through the moral life of man, including his conscience, and that he can be found in these areas. He is supremely immanent in the world in the man Jesus Christ, in his life and activities.

None of these elements needs to be denied. But what needs to be denied is the self-evident character in which these propositions are made. There is no feeling of God's veiling in his presence, and of his presence in veiling. Thus faith simply consists in seeing these events as they are arrayed before one's eyes. Instead of the usual criticism that if one does not accept immanence God is not really present in the world, one ought to reply that in the doctrine of immanence God is not sufficiently present because his gracious disclosure through Christ unto faith is not experienced.

The terms "transcendence" and "immanence," even when used together, leave much to be desired. They do not say what needs to be said. The word "transcendence" can hardly express the hiddenness of God as made manifest in revelation. Nor can the word "immanence" express the veiling and unveiling of God, which means that God is known in faith. The word "transcendence" does not express how fully hidden God is, while the word "immanence" does not express the full presence of God.

D. REVELATION AND REASON

The terms "transcendence" and "immanence" deal with the same general problem as revelation and hiddenness. The prob-

lem of revelation and reason may be said to be correlative rather than identical. The presupposition for what follows is that positive implications can be drawn from the problem of revelation and hiddenness for that of revelation and reason. Revelation and hiddenness is the prior problem; revelation and reason cannot be first. If it is, one is inevitably caught in the predicament of having to deal first with the problem of how revelation can be received, rather than with the fact of its reception followed by analysis of this experience. The church has not and does not start with the question of how God is revealed. It starts with the fact of reception and then begins to ask questions concerning the nature of this reception in relation to all other problems of knowledge.

Theology has too often lost itself in the problem of the "how" of revelation. It has often surrendered its integrity by accepting the demands of a particular type of analysis of the nature and structure of reason and of how God can and must operate in the world. It may be that theology must relate itself to the thought forms of each age—but it cannot surrender itself to those thought forms. Any attempt on the part of the reigning thought form of an age to make theology fall into this trap ought to be resisted from the very outset. It is, of course, true that certain thought patterns lend themselves more readily to the appropriation and expression of Christian revelation, and that other thought patterns are antagonistic. Theology may also have to contend for proper thought patterns, but it cannot put itself in the position of surrendering itself to the transitory philosophical formulations of the nature of knowledge, particularly when they pretend to have defined once and for all the only avenue and medium of knowledge. In short, theology cannot put itself in the position of having to argue whether there can be or is revelation. It can, however, on the basis of its message, defend itself against distortions arising from the thought forms of an age, and on the basis of revelation it can also engage in the question of the relation-

ship of this communication to the problem of reason or the problem of man.

But this also demands that theologians cease the misrepresentation of all philosophical thought as though it were automatically in conflict with Christian revelation. Wherever the problem of reason is defined as "reasoning" to God, or of reasoning as the way toward the content of Christian theology, such protests are in order. But it is equally true that this is not the way in which reason is usually understood in the history of philosophy or theology. The problem more often is that Christian revelation is challenged because it appears to contradict the structure of man, including reason and the world. The real problem is not that philosophers are trying to work their way toward God, and that consequently all philosophy is Pelagian. Wherever this is encountered, let it be admitted that here theology and this kind of philosophy need to part company. But wherever the question is raised in philosophy as to the reception of revelation, let theology also come to grips with this problem, not as if revelation itself were threatened but as if illumination were necessary and fruitful both for theologians and for those who object.

Exactly here is the delineation of revelation and hiddenness of help. From this delineation it is clear that revelation is not an event like other events which can be taken hold of either directly or indirectly. God's revelation is not of the order of other events and its apprehension is a problem of faith. The miracle of the event or its reception cannot be surrendered. But this does not mean that theology can either become obscurant and refuse to deal with the problem of its reception, or that it can retreat into a kind of orthodoxy which makes the clue to revelation the difference between the natural and the supernatural—an orthodoxy in which the proof of the latter is that it breaks into the former. Faith apprehends God in and through the events of history, and concretely in one event as the clue to all others.

But it does not see God in this event because it breaks the established order of events. That Christ is more than the outward events, that he really was raised from the dead—for man—and that God is to be known in the cross and resurrection, cannot be established or disestablished in any direct way, either by the church in the first instance, or by some other group, in the last. Rather the church bears witness that in this outward event—about which certain signs are evident but in themselves not convincing—a deeper event has transpired than meets the eye. And it ought to continue to witness rather than to try to prove. In attempted proof all is lost from the beginning.

The theologian must insist upon the independence of revelation. But this independence cannot be established by setting revelation against the established order of the world. The question still remains: what positive relations exist between revelation and the problem of reason? This depends to a large extent upon the meaning of the word "reason." From the theological side, the use of the word as "reasoning" has already been rejected. It must also be said that such a use of the word from the philosophical side does not concern us. Rationalism, as an attempt to come to grips with the problem of religion, in its positive sense, may reveal something about the structure of the human mind or about the religious impulse of man, but it does not tell us anything which is at all related directly to Christian revelation. Where rationalism is negative, excluding the possibility of revelation, it is dogmatic when it ought to be open at least to the extent of being agnostic. This does not mean, of course, that all rationalism is concerned with the question of reason as reasoning. Nor does it mean that rationalism is any worse or better necessarily than idealism or naturalism.

A positive concern with reason is possible where it does not try to dictate or establish what revelation must be. The problem is the reception of revelation. The long and bitter controversy between Emil Brunner and Karl Barth is predicated upon this

problem. Barth, in his insistence upon the priority of revelation, continually refuses to speak of the nature of the reception of revelation, because he feels that to do so would introduce alien considerations which limit and obscure the nature of revelation. Although it may be necessary to challenge this attitude, one cannot help but feel that, in his argument with Brunner, Barth is right. Brunner, in his analysis of the nature of man, leaves the impression that there is a capacity for words, or a structure of man, which he brings to the situation of revelation. This is the point of contact for revelation, established from the side of man. For Barth to object to such an analysis may appear as the portrayal of a bad temper. But what Barth acutely perceives is that in principle there is virtually no difference between stating the problem in this way and affirming conditions which determine the way in which revelation must proceed.

While Brunner therefore contends that he is concerned with the problem of the reception of revelation, there is sufficient ambiguity to cause one to raise the question of whether he has not slipped back into circumstances he wants to avoid. At the same time, it must be asked whether more does not need to be said than that revelation establishes its own conditions, as Barth implies. The preparation for the reception of revelation in Barth's thought is that God entered history in Christ, that theology must deal with this event, and that theology must proclaim this event on the basis of concepts which can never grasp it but which must nevertheless express it—concepts, to be sure, which may, in some instances, become God's revelation through the act of God.

Solution of this problem can be directed in more fruitful channels if, on the basis of the analysis in which revelation as hiddenness distinguishes God and the disclosure of God from all other categories, one proceeds to the problem of reception as a reality which needs to be described and analyzed. Where epistemology is the first problem, we are always in the situation of the potential

threat to the nature of revelation.[26] But where the ontological character of revelation is accepted from the start, one can proceed to a phenomenological description of the reception of this ontological factor.[27] In other words, ontology is here not dependent upon epistemology, but epistemology rather can be said to flow out of ontology. The question then is not what and how can man know God; it is an analysis of the situation in which he knows. Then if the word "epistemology" is to be used at all, it is as a phenomenologically descriptive category. Historically, of course, the problem is complicated by the fact that in the history of thought, it is not always clear whether epistemology grows out of ontology and is therefore fundamentally descriptive, or whether epistemology has itself become a sort of ontology. Strictly speaking, one might even be pressed to say that the latter alternative means that unwittingly a type of ontology determines epistemology.

Starting with the premise, then, that revelation is received, what can be said of the situation of man in which it is received? From this point of departure, the problem of reason is the problem of the analysis of the nature of man, including his mind, spirit, and total nature, as the context in which a man may or may not experience God's communication of himself in Jesus Christ, apprehended in faith under the witness of his Spirit. Reason, defined in its broadest terms, may then mean the structure of the world and man as the arena in which revelation occurs. If reason is defined in the narrowest terms as the determinant of subject matter, one is already out of the problem of revelation and reason.

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[26] One could ask the question whether or not in all great systems of thought, ontology does not precede and in some sense determine epistemology.

[27] The word "ontology" here is used to refer to a definite reality manifested in the nature of things, and therefore does not simply mean an analysis of being. The statement, "Revelation is ontological," means that it is reality in the midst of being. This is an affirmation, prior to the question of how this is known. Where one starts with epistemology, the ontological character of revelation is always doubtful.

If reason deals with the structure of man and the world, then such things as man's use of words, his nature as a thinking being, his unique place in the created order, his possibility of self-reflection, and a variety of other factors which may be said of man, all form the contextual area in which revelation occurs. It is not irrelevant that revelation occurs to man, but the emphasis is not upon what man can bring to revelation, since this in no sense guarantees the advent of revelation. All these aspects define the structural area in which revelation either occurs or does not occur.

Here the concern is not to describe particular aspects of reason conceived in these terms. It can be noted, however, that such an approach gives the possibility of avoiding an outright antithesis between revelation and reason, either from the side of revelation or from the side of reason. It gives the possibility of describing the transformation which takes place in the reception of revelation, and of indicating that revelation can be received in the context of man's life and experience without his being anything else or different from what he is in his nature as a rational animal. Man is not asked to stop thinking in order to accept revelation. Rather, in the midst of his thinking, which may include an analysis of his nature and perhaps also of his problems, revelation may occur. This may make him think differently and see his problem in a new light exactly because of the answer which is given. In such an analysis of revelation and reason, man is not placed in the position of discovering revelation or of eliminating outright this possibility in the context of his thinking.

It may be that man finds revelation to be an offense. Seen from the side of revelation, this is not because man is a thinking being but because, in the total context of his life, including his reason, he has set himself in opposition to God. This does not imply that reason cannot receive revelation, or that the reception of revelation means the shattering of man as a structural and thinking animal. Revelation may mean that in the very midst

of being man, including the possession of reason, man's entire life is transformed. This is, however, the transformation, not the destruction of man as man. Revelation is not destroyed by being eliminated as extraneous to the life of man. The miracle is rather that, in the midst of all this, God may speak.

From the standpoint of revelation, philosophy by and large may be considered man's monologue with himself. It may also be quite a shattering experience when God comes to man in the midst of such reflections. Or it may be that in this kind of reflection man will not permit God to speak. From the standpoint of revelation, this is already rebellion. Yet where God does speak, it does not mean the destruction of man's intellect but its channeling in new directions. On the basis of revelation Christians are also called upon to outthink the rest of the world, and not only, as the popular notion has it, to outlive the rest of the world. At this point one ought not believe because it is absurd—as a popular interpretation of Tertullian phrases it.

Undoubtedly the absurdity of Christianity consists in its claim that man cannot answer his own problems, and that his existence must be known and redeemed from the standpoint of God. That this is implied in the cross and resurrection makes it even more of an offense. But the offense is not because of stubborn reason; it is because of the total rebellion of man against God, when seen from the standpoint of revelation. Therefore, one could argue that if philosophers state that it is an offense to reason, theologians ought not join with an "amen" without indicating the deeper grounds upon which this feeling rests. In so doing, they may be able to indicate that Christianity is not an offense to reason as such, but may also be said to be possible in the arena of reason. The charge from theologians that this is an attempt to remove the stumbling block need not bother one. If revelation is taken seriously, no one will assume that he can come to revelation without the miracle of God's grace. But it may be the imperative of faith that one attempts to remove, wherever possi-

ble, false stumbling blocks in the way of faith. In fact, this may be the task of some type of philosophical theology for every generation, provided it rests upon revelation. This may also be the task of what is sometimes known as the principle of correlation in theology and its relation to all other forms of human endeavor and culture. If such a procedure is convinced of the centrality of revelation and of the confessional nature which it necessarily must take, it may be one of the necessary functions of theology to try to remove false stumbling blocks. If this is not attempted, the charge of obscurantism is legitimate.

Emil Brunner, perhaps more than Barth, has seen this problem but has not helped because he has not sufficiently indicated that such an enterprise must proceed from the positive character of revelation toward all these other areas. Nor has he helped by continuing to define the problem of reason as if it were primarily a problem of "reasoning." Therefore the intent of Brunner is one with which one may have sympathy, but the way in which he has worked it out leaves many unnecessary and unwarranted areas of ambiguity.

On the basis of a proper understanding of revelation, it is possible to deal positively with the problem of reason. If revelation is understood as grounded in God's communication of himself and in the essential character of veiling and unveiling, the ground is undercut from the beginning for any contribution on the part of reason to the discovery of the nature of God. But the apprehension of the nature of revelation in the midst of reason is not precluded by God's witness in the midst of life, including the life of reason. Revelation therefore grasps and transforms the total man, including his reason. At this point theology ought to attempt to remove stumbling blocks on the road to faith. It ought to claim man for itself rather than destroy him as if that was what God intended. God's killing in order to make alive is a witness to the destruction of rebellion, which is the rebellion also of reason. But it is likewise a claiming of man as if man,

including man's reason, was meant to be transformed by the new dimension of God's forgiveness. The problem of reason, therefore, is a descriptive problem when seen under the criterion of revelation. The activity of God as mercy which is both judgment and grace is analyzed in its negative and positive relations to the total life of man. But it can only be negative and positive in terms of the transformation which needs to be effected.

The degree to which in any age revelation and reason can concretely be seen in relation to each other, will depend primarily upon the prevailing currents of that day. It cannot be denied that particular ages are more amenable than others to the understanding of revelation, and that some are deceptively so. Theology, therefore, must always keep its independence and try to relate itself to the life of man, which is in large part the life of reason. This can only be done if a clear understanding of the nature of revelation becomes the norm for the delineation of its relation to the understanding of the structure of man and his life. The contention here then is that the problem of revelation and reason must always be defined from the side of revelation and hiddenness. At the same time, the contention is also that there is a greater possibility of relating this starting point to the life of man, even the life of reason, than is usually assumed. Revelation is then removed from the threats to its security—as if it could be attacked by something which is essentially of a different nature. Reason is freed of its necessary antagonism to the nature of revelation. It shares in the natural life of man, which sets itself against God, but also at times shares in and receives the self-disclosure of God in Christ as the center of its own life and as the center of new meaning. Reason, understood in this sense, may even mean that man may at times seek for the fulfillment of his life in a dimension beyond himself.

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